THE AGE OF REASON

BY PHILIP GIBBS

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THE AGE OF REASON

BOOKS BY

PHILIP GIBBS

THE AGE OF REASON
THE DAY AFTER TO-MORROW
OUT OF THE RUINS
YOUNG ANARCHY
UNCHANGING QUEST
THE RECKLESS LADY
TEN YEARS AFTER
HEIRS APPARENT
THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD
LITTLE NOVELS OF NOWADAYS
THE SPIRIT OF REVOLT
THE STREET OF ADVENTURE
WOUNDED SOULS
PEOPLE OF DESTINY
THE SOUL OF THE WAR
THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME
THE STRUGGLE IN FLANDERS
THE WAY TO VICTORY, 2 Vols.
MORE THAT MUST BE TOLD
NOW IT CAN BE TOLD

THE AGE OF REASON

A NOVEL

BY

PHILIP GIBBS

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I

IT was the sun shining through the windows of the biological laboratory at Oxford which was the cause, no doubt, of a certain restlessness and inattention among Professor Jerningham's second-year students. There was a faint reek of formaldehyde, not so pleasant as the scent of carnations and roses in college gardens. Some of the women students in their Tudor caps had distracted the attention of Balliol men and others from serious consideration of scientific facts by looking so June-like and alluring as they stacked their cycles in the shed outside and made some afternoon engagements on the river. It was difficult to concentrate on the metamorphosis of frogs—always very boring anyhow—and one student whose hair refused to lie down this morning had given up the attempt and was drawing a mermaid sitting on a rock in his notebook. It wasn't bad as an artistic effort. Other embryo scientists were watching a cabbage butterfly which had flitted into the laboratory and was seeking a way of escape through one of the window-panes. It was symbolical of the spirit of Oxford in grey flannel trousers, whose fancy strayed from this lecture-room to green pastures. One undergraduate of distinguished appearance sat with folded arms and his eyes shut, and a little smile about his lips, in a daydream which had no reference to elementary science. In the opinion of a lady who observed him and knew the jargon of psychology he was probably under the influence of a Freudian *libido*.

Professor Hesketh Jerningham—"Hesky," as he was

called by his students—had mislaid his chalk again. Two of the Somerville girls smiled humorously at each other when they saw him fumbling in his waistcoat and then in the right-hand pocket of his shabby trousers which bagged disastrously below the knees.

"On Miss Allport's desk, Professor!" said a girl named Betty Winter who looked like one of Rossetti's women after fresh air and exercise. She whispered something to one of the Balliol men (young Redburn, son of the Labour leader) who grinned and turned his head to glance at Margaret Allport with amusement and admiration.

"Oh, thanks!" said Professor Jerningham. He picked up the chalk from Margaret's desk—it was the third time he had left it there—and smiled into her eyes for a moment through his horn-rimmed glasses before turning to the blackboard and exhibiting a little bald patch in the centre of his somewhat disorderly hair. Margaret had noticed this approaching baldness and had thought it rather a pity. He was so young otherwise—almost like an undergraduate himself—in spite of being a famous scientist and forty perhaps, or even a little older. When he smiled his eyes were extraordinarily blue and intense.

"Well," he said, drawing a rough diagram of a frog's head, "I was saying something about vestigial organs, wasn't I?" For a moment he paused and turned with an enquiring, almost anxious, glance at his students, as though not quite sure whether he *had* been talking about vestigial organs.

There was subdued laughter from some of the undergraduates. Just like Hesky to forget the subject of his lecture half-way through! He was often thinking of something else —some scientific secrets of his own—while he was feeding them with this elementary pap.

"Quite right, sir," said one of them, with amiable irony.

Lately his absent-mindedness had become a farce, and the other morning he had gone completely off the rails and had begun to talk about chromosomes and the Mendelian law of

heredity when he ought to have been getting on with the cellular structure of plant life.

"Ah, good. Yes," said Professor Jerningham. "You see this minute spot between the eyes? It represents the functionless vestige of a pineal eye, and this little tiddly-wig which I'm now drawing probably represents a disappearing nerve. I dare say some of you know already—unless I'm over-optimistic—that human beings have a so-called pineal gland at the top of the brain which is undoubtedly a vestige of a pineal eye. In the seventeenth century Descartes—of whom some of you may have heard—identified it as the seat of the soul. Nowadays this theory is discredited, and we are inclined to believe that we shall never find the soul under a microscope or by any other means known to science without faith."

There was a little audible mirth at this mild professorial quip, and Hesky turned and smiled at his class. Or rather, he turned and smiled at Margaret Allport, who happened to be sitting in the front row of desks.

It was absurd of her to blush very deeply. But that was because Betty Winter, her best friend, sitting three desks away, leaned forward and stared at her with mischievous eyebrows. Presently she passed a note along, addressed to Miss Margaret Allport. Margaret unfolded the slip of paper and read it with a determined air of indifference, knowing that she was being watched by her correspondent.

"You ought to take a back seat, my dear. Your beauty is disturbing to our sensitive professor. It isn't fair on serious students."

Margaret wrote her answer underneath, refolded it and sent it back.

"Schoolgirl stuff, Betty! Haven't you grown up yet?"

II

SHE could not understand why Professor Jerningham should be so kind to her—the most ignorant of his second-year students. She hadn't the brain of a sparrow really, as far as science was concerned, and was utterly incapable of understanding his lectures, although she spent more time on her books than some of the other girls at Somerville who seemed to absorb biology as easily as ice-cream. Perhaps it was because she came into the lecture-rooms and laboratories as though they were the gateways to a new world. She was still tremendously thrilled by this Oxford adventure after an old-fashioned school at Eastbourne for the daughters of the clergy and a year at home coaching privately and helping her father's curate, Mr. Halliday, with the parish work and the Sunday-school, eager for escape to independence and liberty. Well, it was all marvellous—although she was a little home-sick sometimes for her brother Guy, whom she adored. Already she had grown out of her old self. New ideas had come crowding into her brain, and her sentimental girlhood had slipped away. She had come out of her chrysalis into womanhood, "facing the tremendous problems of life" (as she wrote to her brother), eager for knowledge, questioning old beliefs, talking with girls who also had this new sense of intellectual freedom and escape. They scared her sometimes because of their frankness and audacity. At least she was shocked by Betty Winter who discussed religion and ethics in a way that made her flinch, and by one or two of the other girls who did not believe much in old-fashioned conventions and not at all in old-fashioned prudishness. Not that they were flippant on seri-

ous subjects, except now and then, just verbally. Often their conversation in each other's rooms was quite grave and reverent, although they were alarming in their lack of reticence—alarming to Margaret who shirked some aspects of life, as she had to confess.

They laughed at her about that, not knowing, perhaps, that she was quite aware of her own "inhibitions," as they called these intellectual timidities.

"Our little Margaret has the mind of an Early Victorian miss," said Betty Winter more than once, "but, oh, that schoolgirl complexion!"

It was strange that they should make such a fuss about her because she happened to be born without a snub nose or squint eyes. They screamed with applause when she played Juliet to Betty's Romeo, and one of them—Hypatia Smith—regretted publicly that she had not been born of the male species so that she might fall in love with such a peach.

Betty Winter could never leave the subject alone, although with her red hair and blue eyes she was much more beautiful in Margaret's opinion.

"It isn't fair on the undergraduates having a lovely thing like you walking around loose," she said one afternoon as they were walking together on their way to a tea-shop. "It disturbs their mental poise."

"Don't be an ass, Betty!" said Margaret, laughing.

"When I walk about with you in public places," said Betty, "I can feel the electrical vibrations of the undergraduate male. They sit staring at you with their tongues lolling out, poor brutes."

"You're disgusting, Betty," said Margaret.

Betty Winter nudged her with an accusing elbow.

"Look at those two creatures on the other side of the road. Fairly goggling in your direction."

They were walking along St. Giles's, past the Martyrs' Memorial, and the sun was glinting in their eyes, and Oxford on this summer day seemed wonderfully good to Margaret

Allport in her Tudor cap. Why shouldn't an undergraduate give her a friendly glance now and then? It was ridiculous of Betty to suggest anything of an amorous kind. She was so frightfully cynical—quite brutal sometimes on the subject of sex attraction.

"Here comes another of your victims," she laughed suddenly in a voice like one of her own 'cello strings. "Poor old Hesky! It's quite embarrassing the way he makes eyes at you all the time. He ought to know better at his time of life."

"Oh, do be quiet, Betty," said Margaret, "and he's quite young anyhow."

She spoke impatiently and felt annoyed for once. It was all very well to jeer at her about Professor Jerningham for whom she had a secret hero-worship, but it was absurd to talk about him as though he were senile.

Betty adjusted her cap to a less rakish angle.

"What's the betting he'll stop and talk?" she asked. "I see it from afar. And how the maiden blushes at the approach of her elderly amorist!"

It was a weakness of Margaret Allport's, that vivid blush which now flamed in her cheeks. It always made her feel an ass compared with those other girls like Betty whom nothing seemed to disconcert. She was quite sure anyhow that Professor Jerningham wouldn't stop. . . . But she was wrong. He not only stopped, but shook hands, and held her hand longer than he need have done.

"Nice day," he remarked cheerfully, but did not follow that simple statement by any illuminating thought worthy of a great scientist. He stood there smiling and bareheaded, looking at Margaret with his head slightly on one side, while he jingled some money in his trousers pocket. He was a tall man, over six feet, so that she had to look up to him, though she looked no higher than his little brown moustache.

"Delightful," said Margaret, and then tried hard to think of something else to say, but failed.

Betty was smiling, as though in the presence of high comedy.

"Feel like a walk?" asked Professor Jerningham, but his invitation was more to Margaret, it seemed, than to Betty Winter. "It wouldn't be a bad idea to stretch one's legs a bit on a day like this—that is, if you've nothing better to do," he added, as though he had clutched at a brilliant afterthought.

"Personally," said Betty Winter calmly but firmly, "I have an engagement at Fuller's with a lout from Balliol. But Miss Allport is extremely fond of pedestrian exercise. Aren't you, Peggy?"

She smiled graciously at Margaret, who tried to look cool and unconcerned.

"Just as you like," said Hesketh Jerningham, but he looked down at Margaret as though eager for her acceptance. And it was impossible to refuse. She felt it was in the nature of a Royal Command.

"I should like to very much," said Margaret.

"Oh, good!"

Betty waved her hand airily, and Margaret found herself walking by the side of that professor who was called by some of his students "the greatest brain in Oxford." Even her father was impressed with the name of Hesketh Jerningham. "One of our leaders of science," he had written in a letter she had received only that very morning. "His studies in Evolution are illuminating. Unless the Church of England definitely comes into line with Science, I don't see how we can hold the intelligence of the people . . ."

Margaret tried to come into line with this scientist, but he had a long stride and she felt like a puppy dog keeping up with a greyhound. They went across Christ Church meadows and along the towing-path where some of the eights were out. Up to that point Professor Jerningham had not spoken a single word, though he was whistling a tune that sounded like "Buy a Broom," unless it was "The Frothblowers' An-

them," and seemed quite pleased with her company. Once or twice he glanced sideways at her with a smile of which she was aware though she looked straight ahead and felt very shy and breathless. Was it possible that he was going to make love to her, she wondered. It was idiotic to think so, and yet by some secret signal in her heart, some intuition of womanhood which belongs perhaps to the primitive instincts of the female creature, she knew that she attracted him. She had known it half-way through her first term, and now, half-way through the second, she was becoming alarmed about it. The other girls had noticed it too. . . .

Groups of undergraduates in shorts and sweaters passed them along the towing-path and said "Good afternoon" to Professor Jerningham and looked amiably at Margaret. A rowing coach on a bicycle nearly bumped into them as he shouted out to one of the eights.

"Number three! Don't hump yourself up like that! Number three! What the devil do you think you're doing?"

"Palæolothic stuff," said Professor Jerningham.

Margaret did not find a ready answer to this remark.

Later on he made a more definite assertion.

"We're not going to save the world by British brawn. . . . Trained intelligence is what we want rather desperately. Don't you agree?"

She supposed so. Certainly, she thought, if he said so she was prepared to believe almost anything.

"Oxford is still utterly unscientific," said Professor Jerningham. "There's not a Don here, nor an undergraduate, who realises that civilisation even as we know it—and it's a pretty poor show on the whole!—must reshape itself on scientific lines or go under."

"Is it as bad as that?" asked Margaret brightly.

He seemed pleased with this encouraging question.

"I do honestly think so. Our ideas haven't kept pace with the growth of science. With new powers coming to us by way of chemistry and physics we can't afford to remain an

ignorant sport-worshipping people. That's the way of destruction. Those young men, rowing themselves sick, ought to be studying science applied to life. Isn't that so?"

Secretly Margaret thought that these rowing men were very admirable types of humanity and that probably they got a lot of fun out of this form of exercise. Still, she wasn't going to argue the point with a scientific brain.

"If they don't sit up and take notice," said Professor Jerningham, lengthening his stride, "science isn't going to save them from another world war in which the weapons will be far more murderous than in our last little strife."

He seemed to ponder over that pessimistic prophecy for the next fifty yards or so and then modified it somewhat.

"Not that I'm losing faith in the League of Nations and increasing common sense. . . . Still, the present generation is ignoring the enormous opportunities which science is giving for the control of their own destiny and the speeding up of their own evolution. . . . What's your idea about it, Miss Allport?"

She hadn't any clear-cut idea on the subject and confessed it with smiling humility.

"I haven't thought it out much. Isn't it a rather difficult question for a second-year student?"

He looked at her over his shoulder and shortened his stride, and laughed.

"I'm talking the most awful nonsense. And I've been walking too fast. And I'm boring you to death. Sorry!"

He stood stock still and smiled at her while the wind along the towing-path blew his hair about his head.

"I'm not in the least bored," said Margaret rather breathlessly, because he certainly had been walking rather fast. "It's such a lovely day for a walk—and Oxford is so perfect."

It was a feeble remark, like a schoolgirl's, but he answered it goodnaturedly, looking across the river at the spires and towers sharply etched against a cloudless blue sky, and glamorous in the afternoon sun.

"Yes! There's something about Oxford that gets hold of one. . . . Beauty is inexplicable in a way. . . . Why should one feel uplifted because of a certain arrangement of brown brick or grey stone subjected to certain atmospheric conditions of light and shade? According to the Behaviourists, emotion is only an awareness of a physical response—nervous energy—to physical stimulus. Probably true up to a point—but I'm all for beauty . . . and grateful to my nervous system for allowing me to enjoy it."

He was no longer looking at Oxford through the glinting sunlight but at Margaret Allport, closer to him, under her Tudor cap.

"I'm glad he thinks I'm beautiful," she thought, "but I can't play up to his conversation. Who on earth are the Behaviourists?"

"I'm boring you again," he said, with his very pleasant smile. "I'm the biggest bore in the world. It's deplorable. Come and have some tea, won't you?"

"I'd love to," said Margaret. "But I'm not bored, honestly."

III

IT was not the last walk she went with him, nor the last tea she had in his rooms where there was generally a group of undergraduates feeding on fancy cakes, talking with admirable courtesy to each other—no rough stuff—and asking intelligent questions now and then as a matter of good form or good-nature. At Somerville these walks and talks with "Hesky" formed the topic of ribald conversation, to the tune of gramophone music in Margaret's rooms, among her very particular friends.

"I don't like this philandering between an elderly satyr and our constant nymph," remarked Betty Winter, that red-haired beauty, stretching out her long legs from a deep armchair. "It's dangerous. Somerville is suffering from the gossip of Balliol."

"Besides," said Hypatia Smith, "it's disconcerting to his other devotees. I feel like the virgin who was late with her lamp. The love I have lavished on that blue-eyed biologist!"

Hypatia Smith was the daughter of an eminent judge and imitated her father's style of wit.

Margaret let them rag her, and changed the record on her gramophone, pretending not to hear a word they said.

"Personally," said Camilla Jessop, in her mystical way, "I pity the man. How can he help it when a lovely thing like Margaret sits listening to his lectures with an air of ecstasy as though he were reciting love sonnets—instead of maundering on about ductless glands or spermatogenesis in insects?"

A gust of laughter greeted this oratorical triumph, repeated again when Margaret threw a cushion at the head of Camilla Jessop and broke a brand-new record of Kreisler's.

"Professor Jerningham takes no more notice of me than he does of a dozen others," she protested untruthfully. "Or if he does it's because I'm such an imbecile at biology. It's his good-nature. Anyhow, I wish you'd leave the subject alone."

Betty Winter declined to leave the subject alone.

"A sad business," she said, regarding her long legs with complacency. "Poor old Hesky forgets the passing of time and imagines that he is still an undergraduate with all the liberties of youth. It's the subconscious complex of advancing senility."

"Betty," exclaimed Margaret rather heatedly, "if you don't shut up I shall have to ask you to clear out of my room. And I won't provide you with any more chocolates which have cost me a fortune already."

Betty Winter stretched out a lazy arm and took another chocolate.

"That's a horrible threat," she said with her Rossetti-like languor.

"The whole thing is utterly ridiculous," said Margaret.

But it wasn't utterly ridiculous as she knew with increasing conviction and a sense of wonderment and a shyness which made her blush even when she was quite alone. Professor Jerningham was undoubtedly in love with her. She couldn't pretend otherwise, and it was highly embarrassing and very wonderful. She was getting scared about it. Once when he was looking over her papers their hands touched by accident, and she saw that he was strangely disturbed and looked puzzled in a humorous way as though he had had an electric shock.

Then he was wonderfully patient with her ignorance which was unlike his usual impatience with backward students.

"I'm afraid you haven't quite got the hang of that," he would say when examining her work, or laugh behind his

horners and say, "No, I can't pass that, you know! That upsets the entire order of nature. . . . Notes of my lectures? Well, I must have been talking through my hat. I often do."

"Don't you worry," he told her once. "There are some people born biologists and some born beautiful. I shouldn't be surprised if it isn't a happy combination to the advantage of the human species."

It was quite clear that he thought her mentally defective, as she certainly was when it came to biology. But it didn't seem to make any difference to his interest in her. That was what was so bewildering, and alarming. What could he find to like in her? Of course, she couldn't help being flattered at being admired by a brilliant brain like that, only sometimes she forgot his brilliance and saw him only as a very simple and charming man who needed somebody to keep him tidy and find the things he was always losing. . . .

The inevitable thing—she knew it was inevitable—happened one afternoon in the laboratory. She was messing about with the inside of a dead frog—she disliked that sort of job really—after the other students had gone, and Professor Jerningham was doing some private work of his own with tadpoles from which he had extracted their thyroid glands or something of the sort. Presently he washed his hands in the sink and strolled over to her, whistling that tune of his—Betty said it was certainly "The Frothblower's Anthem"—though he mixed it up with "Three Blind Mice."

"Busy?" he asked amiably.

She nodded and said, "Playing about a little!" and went on with her work, trying not to feel flustered.

"I wouldn't bother about this sort of thing," he said after watching her for a few moments. "It doesn't suit your temperament somehow. You don't go well with dead frogs."

"You mean I'm so stupid!" she protested and pretended to look vexed.

He laughed and rattled his keys in his trousers pocket.

"Good Lord, no! I didn't mean that. It isn't true. . . . What I wanted to say—in my clumsy way . . ."

He hesitated and seemed at a loss for the right words, but she gave him no help.

"I mean you need a better background than a science lab," he said. "I'd like to see you in Italy with purple hills behind you, on one of the Italian terraces—Fiesole—with tall cypresses cutting the blue sky—and so forth."

"That sounds wonderfully romantic," she told him. "I didn't know I went with cypresses. I thought they grew in graveyards."

She was trying to keep cool. Her silly heart was doing some jazz stuff against her ribs. She felt the situation was becoming idiotic. And he was silent after that for what seemed like a long time, while she could hear the rattle of the keys in his trousers pocket.

"Look here," he said quietly with a kind of intensity in his voice. "I'm forty-four next birthday,—O Lord!—and I've two children who are almost grown up and cheek me like anything when I'm at home with them, and I'm a dreadful bore to my best friends, and I dress like a tramp, and all that, but—to tell you the honest truth—and speaking as one scientist to another—I'm desperately in love with you!"

He laughed in a high-pitched voice as though he had said something extraordinarily humorous, and, of course, it was very funny, but also exceedingly frightening.

"I know it's the most horrible cheek," he said. "I dare say I ought to be expelled from the University. I'm quite sure I ought to be! But I'd be tremendously obliged if you would consider the idea of having me for a husband, one day. Does the idea appeal to you at all?"

For the life of her she couldn't answer him. She stood there speechless and stricken by this amazing adventure. And the absurd thing was that she wanted to laugh. She was laughing inside herself although she stood with her eyes

down, getting red in the face, with only a smile about her lips and a flutter of eyelashes.

"It must seem awfully silly to you," he said, thrusting his fingers through his hair and grinning through his horners at this tremendous joke. "I quite understand that. Good Lord, yes! But human nature is a most remarkable thing. It surprises me every day the more I study it. I surprise myself. Here am I, a bit of a biologist, and I get staggered by my own elementary instincts and physical reactions to external stimuli. Amazing, isn't it?"

He laughed loudly at this absurdity of human nature.

"It's most frightfully kind of you," said Margaret, in a small voice. It was the only possible thing she could think of to say, and it sounded very inadequate when she said it. But he was rather staggered by that answer, it seemed. He stared at her searchingly through his horn-rimmed glasses as though afraid that she might be jeering at him.

"Speaking quite seriously," he said, "and all joking apart, is there any chance of your being able to like me a little? An elderly widower, you know."

"Why not?" asked Margaret. She wanted to laugh in an almost hysterical way. But curiously she felt a sudden wetness of tears on her eyelashes. He looked so wistful and shy. He wasn't a bit like a professor of biology.

"Good God!" he said, in a startled way. "What do you mean by 'why not'?"

"Just that," she answered. "I can't see any reason why not."

After that the conversation became a little incoherent. Margaret could never quite remember the thread of it. She remembered only that after a considerable time, which was either two minutes or two hours or all the time between one life and another, he put his hand to her shingled hair and drew her head towards his waistcoat where she felt the top button against her nose. She rather believed that he kissed her first on the forehead and then under her right ear. He

was extremely annoyed when he was interrupted by two first-year students of the male species who sloped into the laboratory quite suddenly, stared as though the world had slipped beneath their boots, and then bolted like frightened rabbits to spread a dreadful tale in Oxford. Hesky had been caught kissing a girl. *O tempora! O mores!* Or again—wow!

IV

OF course it was all very difficult at Somerville when the news of her engagement leaked out. Betty Winter was almost damnable about it in private conversation, bursting out into deep-throated laughter between impassioned speech about the folly, the wickedness, the abomination even, of a lovely rose like Margaret being plucked by an elderly widower like Hesketh Jerningham.

"You see, my dear," she said seriously, "it's bound to lead to inescapable tragedy. There's something to be said for being an old man's darling—for a year or two—but not when he becomes a slippered pantaloon, *sans* hair, *sans* teeth, *sans* everything. In twenty years you'll have to feed him on slops. And in twenty years you'll still be in the full bloom of lovely womanhood gasping for love and eager for life. Margaret, my child, I implore you not to marry this bigamous biologist!"

"It's an honour," said Margaret. "And I happen to love him. And Hesketh isn't old. He isn't middle-aged yet."

Betty Winter, that red-haired humorist, was convulsed with laughter at this point of argument.

"Hesketh! She calls him Hesketh! Oh, stap my vitals, I'll die a'laughing!"

As a matter of fact, it had taken Margaret several weeks before she could call him Hesketh, simply and naturally. But now she was getting quite familiar with this simple and whimsical man who made love to her in a shy way and was absurdly boyish when he forgot his dignity as an eminent biologist, which never seemed to trouble him when they were alone together.

But it was Hypatia Smith, the judge's daughter, with her dark quizzical eyes and sarcastic tongue, who raised the most difficult argument against her engagement—a point that was really alarming to Margaret so that she lay awake at night wondering whether the responsibility would not be too awful.

She slipped into the room one afternoon alone and announced that she had been finding out things.

"I don't want to scare you, Margaret," she said very kindly, "but do you think it's really wise to marry a man who has two offspring—or is it offsprings?—almost as old as yourself! Isn't it rather an unthinkable situation, Margaret? They're quite untamed, I'm told."

"I dare say they'll be kind to me," said Margaret, with a cheerful obstinacy which secretly staggered these friends of hers who had called her a little Victorian miss but now confessed privately that she had the spirit of Joan of Arc and the courage of Nurse Cavell. All the same, her heart quaked at the thought of that boy and girl of Hesketh's.

Hesketh had talked about them quite a lot and was devoted to them. Cyril was at King's College, London, doing "stinks" and getting on brilliantly.

"You'll like him," said Hesketh. "He's a bit queer in his political ideas—thinks there ought to be an intellectual aristocracy with its feet on the neck of massed Ignorance!—but he's clean and keen. I'm proud of him because to some extent he's the product of my mind. Egotism that! He's steeped in the scientific spirit."

"He could hardly help it," said Margaret. "I mean according to the laws of heredity and environment."

Hesketh rewarded this remark with the smile it deserved. Then he was serious again.

"I've talked to him as man to man since he attained the age of reason, answered all his questions frankly, kept his mind free of all slush and superstition. He and Viola seldom wore any clothes when they were youngsters at the

seaside—it's astonishing what effect that has on the health of body and mind. Even now they chuck off their things at the slightest provocation."

"Isn't that alarming to other people?" asked Margaret, smiling doubtfully.

"Oh, they don't bother about other people," said Hesketh carelessly.

Margaret was quiet for a few moments at this stage of the conversation. Certainly Cyril and Viola sounded most alarming. She hoped to goodness she would get on with them all right.

"As for Viola," said Hesketh, "I shouldn't be surprised if she's a beauty one of these days. A wild gypsy now with the grace of a Greek nymph. It's splendid to see her running about like a naiad in our garden at Wimbledon, where we have a bathing-pool just big enough to get a splash in."

"Don't the neighbours object?" asked Margaret rather breathlessly.

Hesketh laughed.

"Well, there's a General next door—silly old gumph—"

He broke off from that line of thought, to reveal another aspect of his children.

"I doubt whether they've ever been inside a church except from curiosity. That has kept them free from all that false old mysticism and magic which warps the mind of youth, and prevents real intellectual progress."

Margaret was secretly perturbed. After all, her father was a Canon of the Church of England and she still believed in the fundamental truth of Christianity—although some of her childish faith had been a little shaken by elementary studies in evolution and the free-and-easy conversation of Betty Winter who denied all revelation and anything supernatural. Even before that she and her brother Guy had decided that the Old Testament was not to be taken literally, and her father, who was very broadminded, had only laughed when they had reported this decision at the tea-table, five or six

years ago, after a heated argument with their governess who had dissolved in tears. But she still felt the need of religion and said her prayers every night, and went to church every Sunday morning in Oxford, unless she had been up frightfully late the night before. Lately she had been rather impressed by Camilla Jessop, who was a Roman Catholic, and went to Mass almost every morning before breakfast and was very interesting about mysticism and miracles and the visions of the saints, although quite normal and humorous and fond of any kind of joke.

"Hesketh," she asked anxiously, "don't you believe in religion of any kind?"

She was sitting in his room on a footstool close to his armchair, ready to spring up and look decorous and busy with her papers if any undergraduate plunged in unexpectedly. His table was strewn with books and papers as usual, and the whole room was distressingly untidy, so that she longed sometimes to sort things out and give the place a more homely look.

He puffed his pipe and smiled at her through a wreath of smoke.

"Oh, Lord, yes!" he said. "I believe in the religion of Reason. I'm going to preach it to the world one of these days. It's the only way of salvation."

"Is it anything like Christianity?" she asked, after a moment's thoughtfulness.

It seemed to be something like Christianity, without God, as far as he explained himself at some length. But he didn't believe in revelation or anything supernatural.

"Not," he said, "in the hodge-podge of worn-out myths with which the Churches try to dupe the modern mind—which is refusing to be duped any longer—while they bicker and quarrel about their conflicting dogmas and don't know what the deuce they really do believe. Apart from Papists who believe everything and don't worry about reconciling faith with facts."

They all believe in the divinity of Christ," said Margaret thoughtfully. "Don't you go as far as that, Hesketh?"

No, he didn't go as far as that, much as he admired Jesus of Nazareth—"the most beautiful character perhaps in the history of the world." As an evolutionist he believed that the human mind had developed like the human body, and that it was capable of attaining far greater intelligence than we could even dream of at present—faculties which would seem miraculous to our present mental range. But not supernatural or magical. The Kingdom of Heaven was within our own minds if we liked to make it so.

"Then you don't believe in a future life?" asked Margaret, rather overwhelmed.

"Only in the immortality of the life-stream and the heritage of noble ideas," said Hesketh rather vaguely, but quite cheerfully.

"I'm rather keen on God!" said Margaret, laughing at his apparent flippancy. "Reason doesn't seem to me quite enough, somehow. And I should hate to think we're not going to be immortal so that our love will end when the worms begin to bite us. Isn't that rather sad?"

She had a smile in her eyes, but behind the smile there was a look of distress which he noticed as she turned her face up to his and put her hand on his knee.

"We'll make a little kingdom of love on earth," he said tenderly. "And anyhow, Peg o' my Heart, you believe what you like—I'm quite sure your idea of God is a very agreeable personality—while I worship your beauty in reverence and awe, as the fairest flower in the garden of life. How's that for a prose poem? . . . These little hands of yours! How delicate they look in my hairy paw!"

For a professor of biology he made love charmingly and more romantically, thought Margaret, than any undergraduate. As for religion and all that, she couldn't argue with a man who knew a million times more than she did and had studied the very secrets of life itself. As long as he was

good and kind what did it matter? Perhaps his ideas of Reason were the same as her ideas of God, apart from ritual and revelation. . . . Still, she was sorry that he didn't believe in immortality. She might feel afraid of life—and death—if one day she agreed with him.

It was not often they talked so seriously as all that. He put off the professor completely nearly always, to come down to the level of her very ordinary mind, and loved any kind of nonsense. Once they toasted muffins together before his gas-fire with their heads touching, and were discovered on their knees like that by young Audley Instone of the House, who apologised with a look of pained surprise but perfect manners, while Hesketh burnt his fingers on his toasting-fork and said "Damn!" as youthfully as any undergraduate.

He also learnt to fox-trot a little to the music of his gramophone, with a Don's wife—Mrs. Lambert—as a broad-minded and romance-loving chaperon. He had no real aptitude for the modern style of dancing, and laughed with shrill heartiness—he had a high-pitched laugh—at the absurdity of it.

"All the same," he said, "I dare say there's something in this rhythmic exercise. It probably stimulates the hormones and creates a certain amount of katabolism. . . . Anyhow, I'll put one over young Viola when I get home. And it's a fine excuse for taking walking exercise with a wood-nymph."

Margaret thought it marvellous that the most brilliant brain in Oxford—the very greatest living scientist, she honestly believed—should condescend to her level with a love that was thrilling and desirable. She hoped humbly to be worthy of him one day, and studied the life-history of frogs and the geographical distribution of fossils with almost religious zeal. But she could never memorise those fearful names. How could a girl with a brain like hers ever hope to be familiar with the statoblast or gemmule of a fresh-water polyzoon? Impossible! Especially as her thoughts were very much distracted by this amorous adventure with a professor of biology, who was anxious for an early marriage.

V

THERE was no trouble about her engagement from her father and mother. They happened to be abroad with her brother Guy, who was sketching in Provence, but she had a charming letter from her father in his finely-pointed writing, and he said that he was happy to think she was going to be the wife of a distinguished man who had undoubtedly contributed new light to the world of science both in original research and brilliant interpretation.

"I regret," he wrote, "that your future husband does not conform fully to the general principles of the Anglican Church (wide enough in all conscience to allow of a variety of opinion), and, from one or two papers of his I have read lately, criticises rather too vigorously perhaps the intellectual compromise which men like myself have established, in all sincerity, between the claims of science (far too dogmatic sometimes on very uncertain evidence) and the reasonable interpretation of divine revelation. That, however, need not worry you, my dear. Maintain your own faith and character, and it is more than likely that your love will lead him to a recognition of a supernatural Spirit—a Design which some of us call God—moving within the natural laws of science. In any case, dear Margaret, I shall pray for your happiness, and remain

"Your very loving

"FATHER."

Margaret was rather interested in that phrase "a Design which some of us call God." It sounded rather vague, she thought. It was difficult to guess how her father could pray

to such an abstract idea of God, and whether if he did so it would help her at all. Still, she was very glad that he approved of Hesketh.

Her mother was a little distressed about the difference of age between Margaret and her future husband—April and September, my dear—but she had known many happy marriages of that kind, and she was so glad that Margaret was going to marry a Thinker and not just a good-looking boy careless of the Eternal Verities.

"Thought," she wrote, "seems to me the only treasure of our unsatisfied minds, and the quest of Truth the only real joy. I have become very much interested lately in some prophecies connected with the Great Pyramid. It was dear Lady Errington who called my attention to them. *Most wonderful,* my dear! But I won't worry your brain with such mysteries when your heart must be filled with joy and emotion. We shall be back long before you need get busy with your trousseau."

A third letter came from Guy, or rather a picture post card with a line or two in pencil.

"Great News! But if I were you I wouldn't marry a scientist or a widower. I know lots of good-looking artists—quite young—with whom it would be a pleasure to starve. Join us in Avignon."

"Dear old Guy!" said Margaret, kissing his writing. That was the one snag about marriage with Hesketh. She wouldn't be with Guy in the holidays. They might not get abroad together and laugh at the same jokes in little French towns. She wouldn't be able to discuss life with him so much up in his room where he sketched her at all angles for practice and bullied her if she shifted her position.

As for her mother's remark about being back long before she got busy with "the trousseau," it was quite comical in view of Hesketh's latest plans. He had resigned his Chair at Oxford as he was going back to research, and he wanted to marry Margaret at the end of his last term, because he

had promised to take Cyril and Viola to Italy, and there were a thousand reasons, he said, for an early marriage, including some very important experiments he was making on tadpoles, and the approach of another birthday which would make him forty-five."

"The flight of time appals me," he said. "Let's marry before I'm old and doddering."

If she didn't mind very much they could get tied up in a registry office without any kind of fuss—no undergraduate nonsense—and start straight away for Italy with that boy and girl of his who would be very much amused at having such a young and lovely stepmother.

Much to his surprise Margaret did mind very much about marriage in a registry office.

"I shouldn't feel properly married, Hesketh!" she exclaimed several times. "Honestly, I shouldn't feel married at all."

"But, my exquisite child!" he cried, laughing at what he called her "old-fashioned notion." Then he launched into an argument which ended up with the simple statement that marriage was marriage whether it was in a church, a registry office, or an aeroplane.

He begged her, half-seriously, to consider his position in the world of Science as an advocate of the Age of Reason.

"No church, no marriage," said Margaret, with an obstinacy which astonished him. But as she yielded to all his other points—the date of marriage and the place of honeymoon—he felt compelled to give in to her primitive superstition. It was arranged that they should be married after breakfast on the last day of term at St. Mary's in the High, in their ordinary clothes and with none but the necessary witnesses.

"If we gave the undergraduates a chance," said Hesketh, "they would be up to all kinds of monkey tricks and make a Merry Andrew of me. So mum's the word, Margaret of Somerville. Don't you agree?"

She agreed perfectly to small things like that—having undertaken the wild adventure of marriage with a lightheartedness which sometimes, when she was quite alone and able to think of anything at all, was almost terrifying. It was all incredible. It was some other girl who was going to marry Professor Jerningham. It couldn't possibly be herself unless she had a dual personality, one part of which had engaged herself to Hesketh, leaving the other part astonished and alarmed.

VI

BEFORE the end of term she had an unexpected scene with Audley Instone—that young man from the House who had come upon Hesketh and herself toasting muffins with their heads together. He had been at Harrow with Guy, though rather older than her brother, and she had danced with him once or twice in town at other people's houses. Now up at Oxford they had resumed friendship, surprised and pleased to recognise each other one day along the towing-path.

"Isn't that Audley?" she had asked, rather doubtful for a second of this stalwart young man in rowing shorts with a sweater round his neck.

He stared at her for a moment before his eyes lighted up.

"That cap makes a difference!" he said, laughing rather nervously. "And it suits you, I must say!"

That was his homage to the face God had given her—or some process of evolution.

"How's Guy?" he asked. "He chucked Oxford for Art, didn't he? Not a bad idea, perhaps. One wastes a lot of time in this city of spires and picture palaces. Very pleasantly, however!"

He was terribly polite and rather shy, she thought.

"Do you ever do a dance these days?" she asked.

He admitted that he had no ethical objections to an occasional fox-trot, though he couldn't be called a dancing man.

"We give a hop now and again at Somerville," said Margaret. "Rather frumpy but not unamusing. If you would care to come—"

He had cared to come and had created something of a sen-

sation among her own set. Hypatia Smith had declared him to be admirably like Owen Nares. Even Betty Winter, who pretended to despise the male animal, admitted that Audley was a cut above the "rough stuff" she happened to know at Balliol. She called him Dionysus for some obscure reason of her own.

He had given tea several times to Margaret and Betty in his rooms, which were very elegantly furnished with an Oriental touch and a joss-stick burning on the mantelpiece. Other men had been there and had made rather a fuss of Margaret according to Betty Winter, though Margaret hadn't noticed it very much. Everybody was very decent to her, though she hadn't the brain of a sparrow, as she discovered with humility. Audley Instone had behaved always in that shy polite way of his, and only once had he become a little less shy. That was when he had punted her up the Cher on a summer afternoon with Betty Winter and the inevitable Hypatia Smith, who had brought a gramophone and set it going when they tied the punt under a willow tree. Those two confederates wandered off on the bank presently, and Margaret was left alone with Audley for five minutes.

"That Smith girl is a bit trying!" he remarked with unaccustomed candour. "The vamp type, I should say."

"There's no harm in her," said Margaret loyally. "It's only her sense of humour. She's frightfully intelligent."

"I'm glad to know," said Audley dryly.

Presently he suggested that they might meet now and then in London and do a show together with young Guy.

"I shall be at a loose end for a time," he told her, "when I go down at the end of this term. It would be rather good if we could see each other sometimes. Good for me, I mean!"

"I'd love it," said Margaret quite sincerely.

"Would you really?" he asked with sudden warmth. "That's very chivalrous of you."

It was then that Betty came back with Hypatia Smith. They declared afterwards that they had miked off to give the lass a chance—meaning Margaret—and laughed mysteriously when she asked chance for what?

Well, that was all she had seen of Audley Instone before he had come into Hesketh's rooms during that muffin-toasting episode which had been rather embarrassing. She was surprised, therefore, and distressed, when he came over to her one morning when she was having some chocolate alone in a tea shop down the Corn Market, and talked to her about Hesketh in a moody way.

"I say," he said nervously, "forgive me for butting in, and all that, but it can't be true about that fellow Jerningham, can it?"

"We're engaged," said Margaret. "Strange as it may seem!" She tried to be brazen but felt self-conscious and shy.

He sat there looking dejected and was silent for a moment, until he spoke moodily.

"He's old enough to be your father, isn't he?"

"Not quite," said Margaret, smiling. "Very young, really."

"What do your people think about it?"

"They don't object. Why should they? It's a great honour."

"An outrage, I call it," he said with a sudden flush of anger. "The fellow ought to be side-tracked. It's not playing the game at his age. Why can't he stick to his frogs and things?"

"Aren't you being rather rude?" asked Margaret.

He admitted that he was being rather rude. He apologised humbly. He insisted upon paying for her chocolate. But when they left the shop together he spoke to her in a low voice in the doorway.

"I say, Margaret, won't you reconsider this idea of yours?

I mean, hang it all, if you *are* going to marry some one, can't you make it a fellow of your own age. I was rather hoping—"

He took hold of her arm and came closer to her.

"If you'd give that damned biologist the push I'd do anything in the world for you. I mean I like you most frightfully. We've known each other since we were kids, more or less, and now I've met you again it seems as if we were getting on rather well—and all that sort of thing. See?"

She didn't see. She was going to marry Hesketh Jerningham the following Thursday morning at St. Mary's in the High, though that was a secret.

"It's very sweet of you, Audley," she answered him. "But I'm booked with Hesketh. And he's not so terribly old, honestly. Only forty-four and a bit."

"Oh, hell!" said Audley Instone.

It was rather distressing.

VII

THE night before her marriage, alone with Betty Winter in her room at Somerville, Margaret was panic-stricken.

"Betty," she cried, "I'm in the bluest of blue funks. I don't think I can face it. I feel—frightful."

It was only on that last night that suddenly this panic had come to her. Ever since Hesketh had asked her to be his wife in that funny way while she was messing about with a frog, she hadn't really thought the thing out at all. She had just gone about in a sort of stupor, inwardly, although outwardly she had smiled and looked perfectly normal and laughed at Hesketh's love-making and liked it. She had been flattered by the idea of being the wife of such a famous man, and it was perfectly certain that she loved him, and didn't mind the difference of age in the very least. The adventure of it all had excited her. It was charming to be kissed by him and put her head up against his chest and stroke his thin bony hand, so delicate and sensitive. But tonight she stood starkly facing the adventure of marriage, and the end of girlhood, and the beginning of an utterly new life with tremendous responsibilities. She was appalled at the lighthearted way in which she had drifted into it. She was seized with real panic, physical and mental. Her feet were as cold as ice. She found herself trembling. She felt a little sick as though she were crossing the Channel on a choppy sea.

"Betty," she said, "it's no joke, you know."

"What isn't?" asked Betty Winter, lying back in the deep chair by the fire-place and watching her through a wreath of cigarette smoke."

"Marriage," said Margaret.

"Some people seem to like it," said Betty. "All those young brides who have their photographs in the picture papers, smiling through their chiffon at idiotic men in striped trousers. They don't look as though they were doomed."

"They don't understand," said Margaret. "They don't really know what it means—most of them. Or else they pretend not to know, even to themselves."

"Well, what does it mean?" asked Betty curiously. "I mean, what does it mean to you, Peggy?"

"I've only just thought about it," said Margaret. "That's the most extraordinary thing about it. I've been living in a kind of daydream or—if I thought about it at all—it was just like the idea of taking a romantic journey somewhere with an interesting companion who would kiss one now and then, and make things comfortable, until one said good-bye at some junction of life."

"Well, I dare say it's rather like that," said Betty. "Personally I prefer to tip my own porters, but if one must fool around with this man stuff—"

"Betty," said Margaret in a low voice which was strained and nervous, "don't talk flippantly to-night. I can't hear it, somehow. Help me out, won't you? I'm feeling desperately in need of—friendship. My nerves are all on edge."

Betty flung her cigarette into the fire and came quickly across to Margaret's chair and then dropped on to the hearth-rug and sprawled her long legs out with her red-gold hair against her friend's knees. The firelight flickered on their faces. The rest of the room where Margaret had spent the happiest hours of her life (apart from moments of anguish with dull and difficult textbooks) was nearly in darkness, except where the firelight reached out to the polished edges of her furniture and sparkled on the disc of a gramophone record, and touched a cigarette box on the table. How proud she had been of this room—her sanctuary, in which she could lock the door against all the world! Now she was

giving it up for ever, with liberty and independence, and the exquisite selfishness of girlhood. Wasn't it incredibly foolish of her? she thought.

"Let's talk this thing out," said Betty. "And you do the talking for once, old thing!"

"I can't even think," said Margaret. "The Blues have got me. You talk to me, Betty."

Betty was thoughtful and made a confession of ignorance, which was unusual.

"Frankly I don't know the first thing about marriage—except that it seems to be a natural and almost inevitable disaster, followed in some cases by babies and ending frequently in the divorce courts."

"You're being cynical," said Margaret.

"No, truthful," said Betty. "Personally I propose to retain my celibacy until some instinctive urge breaks down my intellectual control, and makes me chase some unfortunate male with coy and urgent passion. . . . No, I'm not being flippant. I want to be helpful."

They were silent for quite a time, while the firelight flickered and made playful shadows on the wall where Margaret had a coloured print of Dante and Beatrice meeting on the bridge.

"It's so much more tremendous for a woman than for a man," said Margaret. "A man goes on with his own work. Love is just an evening's entertainment for his leisure hours. Something to come home for. But a woman gives up her body and soul."

Betty agreed with a deep-drawn sigh.

"Yes, alarming! A woman needs a lot of courage to face a thing like that. It's heroic of us, and damn silly in a way."

"After to-day," said Margaret, with a little break in her voice, "I shan't belong to myself any more. I shall belong to Hesketh."

"Utterly," said Betty with a certain ruthlessness. "Mrs.

Hesketh Jerningham, wife of the distinguished biologist, you know! That's the outrage of it. A woman doesn't even keep her own name."

"I shall never be able to be myself as I am now," said Margaret. "That's certain. I shall have to try and think as he does, for loyalty's sake, and try to understand him when he thinks beyond me, and adopt his view of life whether I agree or not."

Betty shivered a little, but not through the coldness of the room, where it was very cosy with a fire on a rainy night.

"Self-surrender!" she said. "Rather terrible if it's not done with the most perfect consent of body and soul. Of course, there may be ecstasy, as when the early Christians went to martyrdom. That helps. I don't deny love and the mating instinct. Everything in biology proves the terrific force of that particular instinct. It's the meaning of life. It's why life goes on. Perhaps it's only egotists like me who shirk this natural sacrifice of self. I dare say I'm a wrong 'un, really."

"I shall have to have babies and all that," said Margaret gloomily. "It's terrifying. It's delivering oneself completely to frightful adventures."

She wept a little, blinking the tears away with her eyelashes, and trying to hide them from Betty.

"I must say you've been thinking pretty straight," said Betty, with a note of admiration in her 'cello-like voice. "It's a pity most women don't think as straight as that before they take the plunge. Perhaps there wouldn't be such messy marriages—such a crop of failures."

"But I *am* taking the plunge!" cried Margaret in a panic again. "To-morrow morning."

Betty put up her hand and drew Margaret's head down and kissed her for the first time.

"Pull yourself together," she urged consolingly. "Perhaps you'll like it. Marriage may suit you, and I rather

think it will. That biologist of yours has a pleasant way with him."

"I'm afraid," said Margaret, white to the lips.

Betty was preternaturally silent. She thought hard with a frown on her face, and one arm round Margaret.

"Look here," she said presently, "it's not too late, you know. There's a pretty good train to Town somewhere about midnight. It goes up with the milk cans. I'm game to come with you if you want to cut and run. We can put up at the Rembrandt. The hall porter is a friend of mine. How's that for a sound idea?"

"It's impossible!" said Margaret. "I'm pledged."

Betty Winter jumped up and paced about the room, knocking over a framed photograph of Margaret's father which stood on a side table and striding about with her hands in the side pockets of her woollen jacket.

"Margaret," she said quite solemnly, "I mean it about the midnight train. If it were a question of saving you from unhappiness I'd jump off a skyscraper, because I'm rather fond of you. You seem to matter a good deal somehow, because there's beauty inside you as well as outside. . . . I'm being soppy, for once! . . . You say you're pledged. Fudge, my dear! You're not going to spoil the rest of your life just because you gave a pledge to a bald-headed biologist in a sentimental mood. Not if I know it! The one question I want to put to you is this: Do you love the brute? If not, then escape while you can and disregard everything else in the world. If yes, then God help you—if there is a God—because I can't. Only get it clear in your own mind. Be dead honest with yourself. No hedging or auto-suggestion."

Margaret was kneeling before the fire. She had her back turned to Betty. Her voice was low, but audible.

"I do love him. I love him most frightfully. I'm certain of it."

"How do you know?" asked Betty sternly.

Margaret analysed her secret emotions.

"I feel happy with him. I don't mind it when he kisses me. In fact, I like it. I admire and respect him most awfully. And he makes me laugh because he's so funny sometimes. And he's so untidy and absent-minded that I want to look after him."

Betty Winter lit a cigarette very deliberately, and puffed a ring of smoke out of her lips and watched it float up to the ceiling which glowed in the firelight.

"I don't think we need to catch that train," she said dryly. "I'll see you to-morrow morning, Margaret Allport, before you go to church."

"Betty, don't leave me!" cried Margaret. "I'm all nerves to-night."

Betty was still awake when at four o'clock that morning Margaret fell asleep before the ruins of a fire that had burnt down to white ash.

VIII

HESKETH had arranged to stroll round to church and meet Margaret there at five minutes to nine. He had a good many things to clear up on this last night of the term besides packing his traps, as he called it, for his honeymoon in Italy. He had decided to travel light, and advised Margaret to do the same as luggage was such a dreadful nuisance at the Customs, and so on. After the wedding they could pick up their handbags in the cab which he would have waiting, and they could slip away from Oxford in a third-class smoking carriage without exciting the attention of the crowd of undergraduates who would be getting back to their own homes.

So it happened, with only a slight alteration in their time-table, due to Hesketh's watch being ten minutes slow and the necessity of clearing up those things in the lab, which took rather more time than he had expected. That ten minutes' difference was a strain on the nerves of the bride who stood waiting in the porch of St. Mary's Church with Betty Winter, while an old verger stared up the street, and a young curate who was to conduct the marriage service began to look anxious. "Very strange!" he remarked, and whispered to a thin-faced gentleman in black clothes who looked like an undertaker, but was actually the registrar of births, marriages, and deaths, with an air of not quite knowing whether it was a funeral or a wedding this morning.

"Drat the man!" said Betty Winter after the first five minutes. "I expect he's forgotten this small engagement. You know how absurdly absent-minded he is."

It was at that moment that Margaret clutched Betty's arm and gave a little cry of dismay.

"Oh, Betty! I believe you've been blabbing. Look at all these undergraduates. I believe they guess what's up."

"I haven't told a soul," said Betty indignantly. "If it's anybody it's that dissolute drab Hypatia Smith. There she is with Camilla Jessop and the whole of our crowd."

"Hesketh will be furious," said Margaret, and yet she could not help laughing at this frustration of all their secrecy, and was not unhappy to think that some of her friends were coming to her wedding. It made it seem less like going to the scaffold. Not that she felt so bad as last night. Now that she stood waiting for Hesketh she felt more cheerful, and uplifted by a curious and rather mystical sense of sacrifice and self-surrender. The colour had come back to her cheeks, and her eyes, Betty said, were as bright as lighted candles. That nerve storm last night had passed away and left her strangely calm. It was Betty who was white-faced and nervy now.

"Quick!" said Margaret.

They retreated to the vestry, from which they listened to the clatter of feet up the church, with gusts of subdued laughter and whisperings and little coughs and titterings, by a mixed crowd of undergraduates. They were Hesketh Jerningham's students of biology, both male and female, and the spirit of a holy rag was upon them. It was fifteen minutes later when Hesketh came into the vestry at last with an innocent look of surprise and distress that Margaret should be there first. He was also somewhat worried about that mob in church.

"It's the herd instinct," he said. "It's the spirit of Babbittry. However, it's not going to prevent my happiness to-day."

He raised her hand to his lips very tenderly, and then whispered to her, "How wonderfully beautiful you are! Your eyes are like stars."

Margaret veiled her eyes with her brown lashes and felt her cheeks on fire.

"Hadn't we better get married?" she asked teasingly.

"Yes," said Hesketh, "let's get it over. I've forgotten the Marriage Service, and it's a long time since I've been to church."

"You repeat the words after me, Professor," said the curate, attempting to be humorous with a great man. "We make it very easy for our candidates. Not like the Science examinations! . . . Have you brought the ring, by the way?"

"Rather!" said Hesketh.

But an absurd thing happened when he was called upon to produce the ring and slip it on the finger of his bride. He fumbled in the waistcoat pocket of that shabby old suit which he generally wore at lectures and pulled out—a dead tadpole.

"Oh, Lord!" he said and dropped it beside the chancel rails before fumbling again and finding the ring.

Betty stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth to stifle an hysterical outburst, and even Margaret was tempted to mirth. It was so utterly characteristic of Hesketh's absent-mindedness, so whimsical, and absurd, and laughable. So it seemed to her then though afterwards in her married life this incident of the dead tadpole on her wedding-day seemed symbolical, and in a way a portent.

The mob of undergraduates at the top of the church were aware of some humorous detail which had escaped them. They whispered and nudged each other, but could not see what had happened because of the gloom inside the church. But afterwards they had their bit of fun, mobbing and cheering their professor and his wife when they came out to the porch through a storm of confetti and rice.

"Good old Hesky! Biology for ever!"

It was Hypatia Smith—"that dissolute drab"—as Betty called her, who raised the greatest mirth by her shrill cry.

"God bless Darwin and the Origin of Species!"

Hesketh took it all good-naturedly and shouted with

laughter in his high-pitched voice. Betty embraced Margaret ardently.

"Bless you, my child! Keep smiling and don't forget old friends." She pressed her face close against Margaret's and whispered to her: "A great adventure. . . . Good luck, my dear."

It was Betty's valour which severed the back rail of the cab from a string on which trailed a toy monkey, several green frogs made of india-rubber, and a skinned rabbit to represent that branch of science of which Professor Jerningham was so distinguished a representative. . . . Hypatia Smith had flung her last handful of rice through the window.

In the cab Hesketh's blue eyes were alight as he raised Margaret's hand to his lips.

"Rather a lark after all," he said. "How does it feel to be married to a professor of biology?"

"I don't believe it," said Margaret, smiling through a few tears which she tried to blink away. But her great adventure had begun. She was in for it all right. No escape now!

IX

CYRIL and Viola were at the station in time for the boat-train, and Margaret felt her heart beat rather quickly when Hesketh said, "There are my two babes. Buying up the bookstall as usual!"

"Hullo, father," said Cyril.

He was a tall boy of eighteen, not unlike Hesketh in length of limb and blueness of eyes, but with a face more squarely cut and broader shoulders. His glance strayed to Margaret with a friendly and amused look.

"Hullo, Professor!" said Viola. "Haven't lost the tickets yet, I hope?"

She was a gipsy-looking thing as her father had said, with tawny brown hair cut like a boy's under a blue béret, and dark wide eyes, rather humorous, thought Margaret, and a curiously animal grace of body when she came striding up the platform in a kilt-like frock above her knees.

"I'm the stepmother of these two," thought Margaret, and for a moment or two she felt absurdly shy. They looked almost as old as she did, and were only a few years younger. It was very embarrassing.

Hesketh kissed Viola's cheek and gave her a hug with his right arm about her waist.

"Here's a new sister for you. You can't possibly call her mother."

Viola shook hands quite politely with Margaret, and stood smiling at her with one hand in a loose jacket.

"I can't say you look like a stepmother," she said. "But it's wonderfully brave of you to marry father. He's a bit of a trial to his family when he's home. Mixes up his letters with the marmalade."

Margaret thought she would get to like this girl. For seventeen years of age she looked perfectly self-possessed and grown-up, but seemed friendly and attractive.

Then she shook hands with Cyril, answering that amused smile of his. She could see that he was measuring her up, and passing judgment.

"Father's all right," he said. "It's Viola that's going to make your life a burden, unless you get her tamed somehow."

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed Viola, with sham indignation. "Cyril is the untutored savage of the family. Blows his bedroom up with chemicals twice a week, and tries to strangle the maid-servants if they interfere with his instruments. He has an over-development of the thyroid gland which makes him moody and murderous at times."

"Now don't quarrel before the train goes," said Hesketh, laughing at his progeny. "And where the dickens have I put those tickets? Oh, Lord! oh, Lord! Oh, devils and hobgoblins! . . . oh, hell and damnation!"

He had left the tickets in a tobacco shop at Paddington where he had bought two tins of his favourite mixture. It meant dashing back in a taxi and catching the train by the skin of his teeth to the hilarious amusement of Viola, who said, "Just like father!" and the quiet cynicism of Cyril who remarked that it wouldn't be the last time.

"The governor strews the Continent with lost pipes, baccy pouches, notebooks, pencils, and paper money," he told Margaret. "Last year we got stranded in Avignon because he had left his wallet with all his available wealth in a café at Arles. All very amusing, and it doesn't really matter. Nothing matters in the long run, I find."

Well, there was Margaret on her honeymoon with a ready-made son and daughter and an absent-minded husband old enough to be her father (though she had denied that to her friends), but young in his ways, quick to laugh at a joke,

alarming sometimes when he talked above her head in a scientific jargon which she didn't understand—though it seemed baby talk to Cyril and Viola—but whimsical and tender and kind to a young wife who had entrusted her life to his keeping.

X

THEY went to Rome and Margaret fulfilled Hesketh's wish, that day in the laboratory, to see her standing under an Italian sky with purple hills behind her, and cypresses rising like spear heads above a marble terrace. That was in the Pincio Gardens after a visit to the Borghese galleries where Viola went into ecstasies over Greek statues which made Margaret feel foolishly embarrassed because of their nakedness. As the daughter of an Anglican clergyman she hadn't Viola's unabashed eyes. And it was in the Pincio Gardens, looking down upon the whole panorama of Rome with its brown-tiled roofs and innumerable domes, and the open space of the Piazza del Popolo, and away to St. Peter's and the hills beyond, all steeped in golden sunlight, that Hesketh denounced Mussolini and the Fascist state as an intolerable set-back to the spirit of liberalism and the Age of Reason, until Cyril warned him that an inquisitive Italian was listening to his words and that they had better move off before they were all arrested and thrown into a lousy prison.

"Besides," said Cyril argumentatively, "I'm all for Mussolini. A certain amount of intolerance is necessary to keep democracy well disciplined. What do Italian peasants know about the art of government?"

"But, my dear lad!" exclaimed his father, "surely you believe in liberty?"

"Only for people who have the intellect to use it," answered Cyril.

It was not the first time or the last that Margaret was aware of a difference of opinion between Hesketh and his son.

"I'm for raising the standard of intelligence all round," said Hesketh. "Then democracy will be worthy of controlling it own destiny. That's my faith and hope."

"Father's an incurable optimist," announced Viola. "And I'm dying for a rose-tinted ice."

They stood in St. Peter's where a crowd of tourists was lost in its vastness, and Margaret was filled with a sense of awe as she looked up to the great cupola where the gold of Michael Angelo's mosaics glinted through the dim twilight. Cyril and Viola vexed her a little by their cynical comments.

"Big, but blatant!" said Cyril. "And one doesn't even realise the monstrous size of it. Our St. Paul's looks more impressive in my opinion."

"And why all those fat babies—cherubs, aren't they?—sprawling about the pillars," asked Viola. "They look like advertisements for Glaxo."

Margaret moved away from them and stood looking down upon the tomb of St. Peter below the great baldachino by Bernini. She had read in her guide-book that down there in the vault was part of the very pavement of the old amphitheatre where Christian martyrs were torn to pieces by wild beasts in the time of Nero's persecutions, and she remembered an old picture she had seen as a child in the nursery. The thrill of horror and compassion she had had then came back to her for a moment. Hesketh denied the supernatural side of Christianity, but those early Christians had had no doubts, and faith had given them wonderful courage. Her own faith was slipping, she felt, and perhaps she would lose something which made life seem more beautiful. . . . She had always liked St. Peter, even though he had denied Christ when the cock crew. He had wept afterwards. And he was so human and simple and honest. "Thou art Peter, and on this rock I will found My Church." . . . It was all very extraordinary and marvellous, although Hesketh thought it was just a fairy-tale.

Hesketh stood by her side and talked in a low voice.

"There's no historical evidence, of course, that Peter was ever in Rome. All this is pure myth."

She said something about "tradition," but she wished he hadn't spoilt her thrill of emotion like that.

He wandered with her round the side chapels, peering through his horn-rimmed glasses at the paintings by Domenichino and other masters which he pointed out to her, after glancing at his Baedeker.

"Tremendously interesting," he said, "but the whole thing is a monument of monstrous superstition. It's incredible that it still has power over the human mind. The Catholic Church is the greatest enemy of science. We can't make any real progress towards the Age of Reason until we have challenged and overthrown its intellectual tyranny."

"Aren't you rather intolerant?" asked Margaret, smiling at him. "I don't know much about Roman Catholics—father has no use for the Pope!—but I had an idea they encouraged learning and the arts. Almost too much, it seems to me. I'm rather overwhelmed by all those paintings and statues."

Hesketh was surprised by this challenge to his words, but he answered good-naturedly, as always.

"In a way you're right," he said. "I admit that civilisation owes a great debt to Rome. I don't want to be intolerant or unhistorical. For fifteen hundred years the Catholic Church stood, on the whole, for light in darkness. Christianity at its best was better than paganism at its worst, less cruel, though very cruel sometimes, keeping idealism alive in a world of brutality in spite of its superstition and corruption. Yes, I want to be fair, but nowadays human intelligence has moved on—must move on! We must liberate the mind of men from old myths and magic—however comforting and helpful to primitive communities groping their way to truth through terror and torment. Do you see those confessionals there? How can we hope for intelligent progress—the Age of Reason—a better kind of world here and now—

when millions of people are still duped with false promises of future reward in the next world—which doesn't exist!—to reconcile them with the dirt and misery and agony of their present life, which does? . . . Torturing the human mind with morbid fears! Hell and all that dreadful heritage of intellectual darkness! Threats of punishment by bigoted priestcraft— Horrible!"

"They don't *look* tortured!" said Margaret, putting her hand on her husband's arm, and glancing at a group of people praying at one of the side chapels, where a red lamp was burning before the altar. A peasant there was kneeling on the stones with a handkerchief tied round her head which was raised towards a picture of the Descent from the Cross. Perhaps her son had been killed in the war, and the dead Christ with His Mother reminded her of her own grief. But she seemed to get some comfort out of her prayers. Her face had a strange look of serenity. At least she believed in something beyond death.

"These people still believe in miracles," said Hesketh. "They pray for fine weather for their crops, a little more rain or a little less—and promise to put up a candle to the Virgin Mother if they sell a faked antique to an American tourist, or if their imbecile child can be restored to health. That's not good. And it's not good because it's not true. God is truth!"

"Perhaps faith can work miracles," said Margaret. "Camilla Jessop told me some very queer things about Lourdes. People healed of all sorts of diseases. She vows they're true."

"My dear child!" said Hesketh, and he looked shocked and amused at this simple credulity. "Mrs. Hesketh Jerningham! That will never do."

He revealed the joke to Cyril and Viola half-way down the great flight of steps below the vestibule, towards the broad piazza with its Doric colonnade where the midday sun shimmered up from the white flagstones.

"This Margaret of mine believes in miracles! What are we going to do about it?"

Viola, who was taking a photograph of a Papal Guard, spoilt her snapshot because of this amazing statement.

"Good Lord! You're just pretending, Margaret, aren't you? After two years at Oxford under father."

Margaret laughed good-humouredly, with her usual humility about her own intelligence.

"I'm afraid the Jerningham family are beginning to shake my faith. You're all too clever for a small-brained mammal like me."

Cyril was looking at her with amusement, but he came to her rescue with a generous and surprising remark.

"Perhaps we think we know a bit more than we really do. As far as I'm concerned I'm prepared to admit all kinds of mysteries beyond the range of science. We know nothing really."

"What humility!" exclaimed Viola ironically. "There's nothing father doesn't know, and precious little that I don't."

Hesketh grinned at them.

"We're finding out things rather rapidly," he said, "though I agree with Cyril that we haven't got to the bottom of everything. Still, we needn't fall back on myths and magic to explain the inexplicable. . . . How about an Italian vermuth, in which we can drink confusion to all tyrannies, lay and ecclesiastical?"

"Hush, father!" said Viola. "That Papal Guard is probably a Blackshirt when he's off duty, and he's cocking an uneasy ear under his steel hat."

XI

MARGARET had a queer psychological experience in the catacombs of St. Callixtus along the Appian Way, where once Emperors and legions and chariots and all the pageant of Roman life had passed by, and where now along the white dusty road old wine carts came jolting through the hot sun with peasants half asleep under coloured hoods. Perhaps it was the sun which had given her a headache, or the sudden chill of those dark places below ground where the early Christians had knelt before their altars and buried their dead and hidden from persecution.

She and Cyril had gone there while Hesketh and Viola were paying a second visit to the Colosseum. An old monk had led them down, lighting bits of candle for them with his twisted taper. He had pointed out the bones of some of those ancient dead lying on shelves in the walls, and the painted frescoes in small dark chambers, symbolical of the Holy Eucharist and baptism and their primitive ritual.

Ahead of them was a party of Americans.

"This certainly is some burial-ground," said one of them. "Those early Christians must have had strong constitutions. If we don't get pneumonia down here I'll be surprised."

Cyril looked bored.

"Rather a morbid place," he said. "I hate being reminded of death. It's so discouraging!"

"I find it thrilling," said Margaret. "How wonderful it must have been to have such faith—ready to die for Christ in that awful arena! I should hate to be hugged by a bear. Worse than the lions, really, don't you think?"

"Most unpleasant," said Cyril. "Personally I should have

sacrificed to the old gods with any mental reservation that seemed necessary to my philosophy."

"That would have been cowardice!" protested Margaret.

"Common sense," he said calmly. "I hate fanaticism, and it's absurd to get martyred for something quite uncertain."

"But they *were* certain," she argued. "They loved God more than they feared death. They believed utterly in the promises of Christ."

Cyril was silent for a moment, staring at the bones of one of those early Christians under a glass lid.

"I'm afraid they were duped," he said. "There's no real evidence about survival after death. . . . One would like to know."

The Trappist monk had joined the party of American tourists a few yards ahead, and Cyril moved towards them. Margaret lingered for a moment in the small dark chamber that had once been a chapel. Her candle threw a faint flickering light into its recesses. With her left hand she touched one of the damp walls with an instinctive idea that by doing so she would get in touch with the past, establish contact as it were with the spirit of the place. And suddenly she seemed to have an extraordinary awareness of something that had happened there. She seemed to feel the presence of unseen people kneeling about her. A light which did not come from her flickering candle dazzled her eyes. The little chamber was suffused with it, and through its radiance she seemed to see a figure more shining than the light standing by the altar with outstretched hands just a second before her candle was blown out by a draught of air and all was blackness.

"Cyril!" she called.

He came back at once and found her leaning against the damp wall.

"Unwell?" he asked anxiously.

"A bit queer," she told him.

The monk came back for them, frowning with comical indignation because they had lingered behind.

"Please, please!" he said. "It is not good to stay back. A night in the catacombs—not amusing, eh?"

"Hang on to my arm," said Cyril. "We'd better get out of this mouldy place."

In the garden by the side of the Appian Way, with the sun beating down upon them, he looked at her anxiously again.

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost," he said.

She smiled, but still felt rather frightened.

"I believe I did! Unless I had a touch of sunstroke or something." She told him about the light in the little chamber and the shining figure.

"Indigestion," said Cyril. "That lobster we had at lunch."

"Quite likely!" said Margaret, laughing.

But that night in the bedroom of the Hotel Flora she spoke to Hesketh about this peculiar experience, still vivid in her mind. That light and the shining figure! How did he account for it?

He accounted for it easily. It was partly physical, he said, due to the sudden transition from the hot sun to that dark dank underworld. That had lowered her vitality sharply, so that the brain was dissociated from its normal controls. The rest of it was autosuggestion, always most powerful when the body was in that condition. That "awareness" of something outside herself was a familiar phenomenon of psychological disturbance and was the prelude to all those mystic visions recounted in the lives of "saints." He had had an experience of the same sort himself once at Boar's Hill, Oxford, after he had been working too hard and had gone for a walk on an empty stomach. He seemed to be conscious of all infinity, and saw the whole universe like a point of light and was aware of some pantheistic ecstasy, thrilling through him. As for Margaret's little experience, of course, she had been overdoing her sightseeing—all those pictures and churches. Her imagination was excited, and

for a moment her subconsciousness had taken control. What she had seen was purely subjective.

At least that was what Margaret could understand from his somewhat lengthy explanation.

"It sounds all right!" she said teasingly. "But supposing I did see something, as I believe I did?"

He said "Rubbish," and kissed her under the chin.

Of course, he knew best, she thought. There was hardly anything he didn't know, as Viola had said. And who was she to put her undeveloped brain against his keen intellect? . . . All the same, that moment of light in the catacombs—that shining figure with outstretched hands—had seemed intensely real.

XII

AFTER Rome, Florence, at the Grand Hotel, with a suite of rooms all to themselves overlooking the Arno, with a distant view of the Ponte Vecchio where Dante had met Beatrice, as in the picture by Henry Holiday still hanging in Margaret's room at Somerville. Then more picture galleries until Margaret's feet tired and her eyes ached; more discussions about mediæval life and faith; more biological explanations from Hesketh and pagan comments from Viola, who delighted in nymphs and satyrs and said how jolly it must have been to run about the woods of Greece stark naked in the sunshine with vine leaves in one's hair and no old ladies of Wimbledon to be worried by this freedom.

Margaret felt a little like the old ladies of Wimbledon until she became more accustomed to Viola's sense of freedom, especially in regard to clothes. She had a habit of strolling into their bedroom before breakfast in nothing but a chemise, and more than once astonished and delighted some Italian labourers working on the embankment by kissing her hand to them in this scanty costume, as she stood on the balcony in the early morning sunshine.

"My dear!" cried Margaret, laughing rather nervously. "For heaven's sake come in and put on some more clothes. You make me feel hot all over."

"What ever for?" asked Viola with perfectly frank astonishment. "Surely you're not one of those people who get fashed about taking one's clothes off? I can't understand it. What's wrong with our bodies?"

She was utterly unconcerned one morning when a waiter

brought in breakfast while she was doing rhythmic exercises with hardly a stitch on in Margaret's bedroom, while Hesketh was shaving in the little bathroom next door.

"Buon giorno," said Viola cheerfully, continuing her exercises quite unabashed.

"Buon giorno, signorina," replied the waiter equally unabashed, while Margaret put her head under the bedclothes, blushing furiously.

She spoke to Hesketh about it afterwards.

"Do you think it quite right, Hesketh, honestly? I nearly died when the waiter came in, though I must say he didn't seem to mind in any way."

"Perfectly all right," said Hesketh. "I've brought her up like that, as I think I told you."

"But surely there's such a thing as modesty?" said Margaret.

Hesketh pooh-poohed the idea of modesty.

"It's all a matter of habit," he said. "Viola thinks nothing of it, and therefore she's modest. If she did it out of bravado or with coquettishness, of course it would be immodest."

"Well, I've certainly married into a most extraordinary family!" said Margaret, laughing. "I'll never get used to the Jerninghams."

Even Hesketh was alarming sometimes in his disregard of clothes, and Cyril was like Viola, and came into their bedroom in his pyjamas before she had finished dressing without apologising for this intrusion, and smoking a cigarette on the balcony, chatting in a friendly way with her while she put on her frock.

Hesketh's and Margaret's bedroom on their honeymoon was like a public rendezvous, and at night they played bridge there, or did poetry games, which consisted of each writing a separate line and passing it round twice until a six-lined verse was finished. Hesketh shouted in his high-pitched laughter

at Viola's wild flights of fancy, or at Cyril's use of scientific terms to make eccentric rhymes and far-fetched similes. Only Margaret spoilt the game by a weakness of scansion which shocked Viola's sense of rhythm even more than Margaret had been shocked by Viola's lack of clothes.

XIII

THEN Venice, dream-like with its canals and gondolas, but rather smelly and insanitary according to Hesketh's views. They stayed at the Danieli, and Margaret, who looked like a lady of the Strozzi (said Hesketh, who always pretended she was beautiful), was charmed with its tapestries and painted walls and huge old mantelpieces richly carved, and tall thin pillars rising to galleries above, tier above tier. She looked down through the sculptured arches into the great hall, imagining the dark-eyed princesses who once peeped over these balconies at their gentlemen in all the splendour of Renaissance fashions. Now American mothers with white hair sat there after dinner writing innumerable post cards to friends in New York and Boston, Mass., while their daughters used their lipsticks, chattered in shrill gaiety and showed off their flower-patterned shawls bought that very day in the Merceria.

"These American flappers," said Hesketh, "are the heiresses of the world's wealth which once used to pour into Venice, now rather mouldy and decayed."

"That lipstick stuff is rather silly!" said Viola.

"They're not unattractive," remarked Cyril. "But if ever I'm tempted to kiss a girl I'd like her lips as nature made them."

"Haven't you ever kissed a girl?" asked Margaret teasingly.

"It's an unhygienic habit," said Cyril carelessly, "and that sort of thing doesn't interest me anyhow, at the moment."

"Well, I don't know," remarked Viola thoughtfully. "I wouldn't mind a passionate love affair, just to see what it's like. Theoretically it sounds ridiculous, but nature seems to

call for it. Father is still amorous in his old age, I notice. I suppose when once one begins—"

Hesketh laughed heartily, but, much to Margaret's relief, did not encourage Viola to further reflections on the subject.

They sat outside a café in St. Mark's Square, listening to a stringed orchestra and watching Italian officers pacing up and down in long grey cloaks, thrown over one shoulder to prove descent from the Roman toga, and Venetian girls very saucy in long black shawls tight round the hips, parading with boys who wore most of their hair on their foreheads, and occasional Blackshirts walking in couples and scowling like Mussolini to show their Fascist spirit and relentless will-power.

After breakfast one morning, in one of the black gondolas swaying gently and answering like an intelligent thing to the fin-like stroke of the long oar, Viola took snapshots of the Bridge of Sighs ("Still the way to a filthy prison," said Hesketh) and the Doge's palace, rose-pink under an emerald sky, and the old Rialto where Shylock the Jew had cursed the Christian gentlemen who spat upon him, and the Church of Santa Maria della Salute with the water lapping at its steps.

Hesketh revolted against going into this church. He was getting tired of Italian churches, and they always made him depressed because of his hostility to people lighting candles before statues of the Virgin, and women crossing themselves many times before dim old pictures of the Mother and Child. So he stood on the steps with Cyril discussing the inheritance of acquired characteristics and smoked a pipe while Margaret went inside with Viola, who said that these dark old churches gave her a funny sense of gooseflesh which was rather enjoyable.

"It's exciting," said Viola cheerfully, "to think of all the frightful things that have happened in an old church like this."

"What sort of things?" asked Margaret.

Viola gave a glowing catalogue.

"Women sobbing their hearts out after sinning against their idea of God. . . . Young men licking their lips because of lovely virgins in black veils. . . . Old men remembering their murders and their poisonings. . . . Dead bodies lying before the altars with their wounds congealed. . . . Assassins coming here for their hiding-place. . . . Plague-stricken folk spreading their pestilence. . . . Thieves prowling behind the pillars. . . . Kings and tyrants praying to heaven for blessings on their daily deeds, including the torture of their enemies, and the strangulation of unfaithful wives."

"Good gracious!" whispered Margaret with a nervous laugh, "what a morbid imagination you have!"

"It's my sense of realism," said Viola.

"You've left out all the saints and heroes," said Margaret, "all wives and mothers and sweethearts doing their duty faithfully, and trying to be good, poor dears."

"Yes, poor darlings!" said Viola. "And all the time, though they didn't know it, they couldn't help their instincts, any more than I can. It's all a case of heredity and environment and chemical reactions, and other things over which we have no control."

This was in the gloom of Santa Maria della Salute filled with the scent of stale incense, and a vague mist through which there was a glimmer of candlelight before a statue of the Madonna.

"Don't you believe in Free Will?" asked Margaret in a whisper, amused and a little shocked by this girl at her side —the daughter of her scientific husband.

"Good heavens, no!" said Viola. "What an old-fashioned idea! I'm a Behaviourist."

Margaret had heard that word before somewhere. Probably Hesketh had mentioned it. It sounded all right.

"I am what I am, I shall do what I shall do," said Viola as though chanting a ritual, "because of the Mendelian laws of heredity and the physical reflexes developed in my childhood

by my eccentric and distinguished Pa, who conditioned my responses to the unverbalised stimuli, and so forth."

"What utter rubbish you talk!" said Margaret with smiling impatience.

Viola grinned through the gloom.

"You ask father! He knows all about it, though he thinks the Behaviourists are rather absurd and still believes in the conscious Mind. Well, he's got to put up with me, dear man!"

She sloped off to look at the High Altar, and it was then that Margaret was startled by something familiar in the figure of a young man standing by the statue of the Madonna. He was in white flannels with a blue jacket, and as he turned his head he looked astoundingly like Audley Instone, and yet it seemed impossible. Margaret moved closer to him and he turned so that their eyes met.

"Good heavens!" he said in a whisper. "You here?"

"On my honeymoon," she told him.

"Well, I'm—"

He was certainly going to say "damned," but environment, as Viola would say, checked him, and he said "blowed" and stood there smiling at her incredulously.

Margaret felt eager for Audley to come and talk to her. He knew her brother Guy and was one of her caste as it were—not so scientific as Hesketh and Cyril and Viola. It would be nice to see him at the Danieli, where he would look well against one of those sculptured mantelpieces.

"I've been on the Lido," he said. "Sun-bathing with pretty ladies. Are you staying in Venice?"

"Another few days," said Margaret. "The Danieli. Come and see us."

He hesitated as though greatly tempted and then, faced by some implacable difficulty:

"I'm afraid I can't. I'm off to-night for three months in Rome. It's to brush up the lingo before I get a stool in the Foreign Office. May we meet in London?"

"If you don't mind meeting my biologist," she said, laughing. She was tempted to remind him that he had called her husband "that damned biologist," but it would sound awful in Santa Maria della Salute.

She knew he remembered, because of the way his face flushed and the subdued laugh he gave.

"If there's no objection on his side."

She saw Viola hovering in the neighbourhood, and beckoned to her.

"My stepdaughter," she whispered to Audley and smiled at his sudden start of surprise, amounting to amazement.

They went out of the church so that they could talk more freely, and stood in the warm sunshine there. Audley looked deeply bronzed, she noticed, after that sunbathing on the Lido. Viola seemed to like the look of him. Hesketh and Cyril had gone back to their gondola moored up to a pole at the bottom of the steps.

"You're a sun-worshipper, I see!" said Viola in her friendly unaffected way.

He agreed and smiled from her to Margaret, as though their relationship was amusing and unbelievable.

"The sun's all right on the Lido," he admitted. "But they mix it up too much with cocktails and jazz. It's paganism up-to-date. Almost Futurist."

"What could be better?" asked Viola. "How splendid!"

Audley laughed and his glance lingered on her grace of body, her nymph-like look with those wide brown eyes.

"It's not unamusing," he agreed. "Lotus-eating, you know."

Then he turned to Margaret, and said something about an impatient gondolier.

"In three months, then," said Margaret. "Address—the Foreign Office."

He bent over her hand in the Italian way and said: *"Arivederla, Signora."*

They watched him get into his gondola rather gracefully,

and he turned to wave his hand to them as it answered the long sweep of the gondolier's oar.

"Who was your good-looking man?" asked Viola. "Very English and very stupid, no doubt, but wonderfully beautiful."

Margaret told her that it was Audley Instone, a friend of her brother's. She did not mention that incident in an Oxford tea-shop when he had become sentimental and passionate. But it came back to her as a pleasant memory. It's always nice to be admired.

XIV

ON the way back to England by the Rome express to Paris, Margaret read a French novel by André Maurois and, at intervals, between meal-times and looking out of the window at the passing scene, a book of Hesketh's entitled *The Ductless Glands.*

She had an idea that as the wife of a scientist she had better get to know something more about his particular branch of science, and what he was aiming at—that Age of Reason he was always talking about. She was a hopeless ignoramus in spite of her two years at Oxford. Hesketh was very much amused at this interest in his small book. He smiled at her several times over his Baedeker—he was refreshing his memory about all the glories of art they had seen—and then dozed in the corner seat. Viola and Cyril were playing "California Jack." An Italian gentleman was practising the Mussolini scowl with folded arms, opposite a bald-headed German who read all the advertisements in a copy of *Die Woche.*

Well, now, these Ductless Glands—

It seemed that the pituitary was rather important. She would have to remember that.

"Over-development or improper functioning leads to an enlargement of the head, hands, and feet, and is probably the cause of abnormal people known as giants. Dwarfs are caused by an absence or atrophy of the pituitary. Complete removal causes death. Partial removal causes the same symptoms as lack of thyroid—stupidity and old age."

"Very alarming!" thought Margaret. "I hope my pituitary is all right. And I wish that Italian wouldn't keep scowling. I wonder if he has indigestion?"

Then there was the thymus gland.

"It is well developed at birth, remains active in early years, and dwindles away as childhood passes. There is some evidence for believing that it is actually the gland of childhood, keeping children childish and sometimes making children out of adults, though that perhaps is a fanciful way of stating the case. It is certain that many criminals retain their thymus glands which should have shrivelled up at puberty."

Interesting that. She wondered if Viola still retained her thymus. She looked like a young Greek goddess when she hadn't any clothes on, but she behaved sometimes like a tomboy. A most amazing girl, but extremely amusing. . . . She seemed to be winning at "California Jack" and had a pile of Italian paper money which she had won from Cyril.

Adrenal glands. Well, what about them?

"They influence the character as well as the body of a human being. Pain and excitement, especially fear and rage, bring about a discharge from these glands.

"The nerve cells become more sensitive to stimuli, more sugar is poured into the blood. The heart beats more strongly, the eyes see more clearly, and the breathing is more rapid."

Queer! . . . And she wondered what Hesketh's house would be like at Wimbledon, and whether she would get on with the servants. They might be hostile to a new mistress. Hesketh must have let them do what they pleased, really, and Viola was very disorderly so that she couldn't help much.

But still—

"It is possible," she read, "that by stimulating or reducing the activity of these various glands we may one day alter human character itself and control human passions and emotions. We may use the human body like an instrument, and play on the glandular scale as a pianist plays his combinations of notes. A little more thyroid, or a little less, an extra discharge from the thymus or a slight increase or de-

crease of the pituitary, a few spare parts from monkeys or human bodies to replace one of the sex glands, or a chemical combination which will restore their activity . . . and there you get your fingers on the instrument of life to change old men into young, to make giants or dwarfs, to extend youth, to increase imagination, or a sense of beauty, to make saints out of sinners! All this sounds fantastical and funny, yet biologists and others are working towards that knowledge which may speed up the evolution of mankind."

Margaret read that passage twice, and then looked at her sleeping husband in a startled way. No wonder he didn't believe much in God! He was trying to take the place of God, in a way. Those ideas were rather frightening—surely very dangerous? And yet Hesketh was so simple and kind and humble. Throughout this honeymoon of theirs he had been chivalrous and tender. She had never felt afraid with him . . .

Hesketh wakened with a jerk when the train stopped at Pisa. He became conscious of her wondering startled look upon him.

"Did I snore?" he asked, smiling at her. "How do I look when I'm asleep?"

"Benign," she said, making him laugh in his high-pitched voice.

Thirty-six hours later the Jerningham family were back in England, and Mrs. Hesketh Jerningham—how overwhelming that still sounded!—felt rather strange at first in her husband's house at Wimbledon.

XV

"OUR home, sweetheart!" Hesketh had said when they drove up to the front door of that large house standing in its own grounds in a quiet road called the Grove, not far from Wimbledon Common, and Viola had flung her arms round a comfortable-looking old body in cap and apron and introduced her as Squeaky, her real name being Mrs. Squeede, who had once been nurse to Cyril and Viola and was now cook and housekeeper. There was also a friendly wire-haired terrier by name of Voronoff, who wagged his tail to his new mistress, and a young maidservant with bright eyes and a pretty face who seemed glad to see her.

Yet somehow it didn't feel quite like home to Margaret Jerningham. Perhaps the sea-crossing had made her feel depressed, or she was suffering from a kind of stage fright before beginning the real routine of married life—that honeymoon hadn't seemed real at all, but nothing more than a passing dream under the blue sky of Italy, from which she would wake up in her room at Somerville before attending a morning lecture by Professor Hesketh Jerningham.

It was not a very homely house, she thought. It was shabbily and barely furnished, with no curtains to the windows—Hesketh said they kept out the ultra-violet rays—and with only a few rugs scattered about bare boards, stained brown. Every window in the house seemed to be open, so that doors kept banging because of a gusty wind and Viola's habit of leaving them open when she passed through a room. Books were scattered about on chairs and sideboards, even in the dining-room, which was furnished in a heavy Victorian way like a dentist's consulting-room in Harley Street, only not so highly polished.

There was a laboratory built out at the back where a conservatory had been and Hesketh showed it her with pride.

"My workshop," he said. "Some day I may find out something worth while—for humanity's sake. If it weren't for the time I wasted at Oxford teaching baby stuff to callow youth—"

She reminded him that she had been one of those who had wasted his time, and that made him put his arm round her waist in a husbandly way while she looked round that workshop of his and found it exactly like the laboratory at Oxford, but more untidy. There was the same smell of formaldehyde and the same kind of sinks and rows of jars containing pickled tadpoles and frogs in various stages of development. It didn't give her a homelike sensation. It wasn't at all like her father's house in Belgravia with its cosy chairs and soft carpets. Their bedroom upstairs was extraordinarily bare of furniture, with two small beds covered with grey blankets—suitable for soldiers—long cupboards built into the walls to save the need of wardrobes, and a dressing-table with a small mirror. To Margaret, who loved "pretty things," it looked rather like the operating theatre in a hospital or a private room in a nursing home, but she didn't express these thoughts to Hesketh, who seemed very pleased with it all and glad to be home.

"This old house grows on one," he explained. "There are no frills about it, but it's roomy and light and airy."

It certainly was airy. Another door banged downstairs with violence. Viola had probably passed through in her restless way.

"A house of science," said Hesketh, watching her expression with just a shade of anxiety, she thought. "We're all students here, searching into the secrets of life in one way or another. Even that madcap Viola, who helps me with my experiments and knows her way about."

Margaret clasped her husband's arm.

"I'm afraid I shan't be able to live up to you all!" she

exclaimed, laughing a little. "I'm hopelessly unscientific. You know that already."

He pooh-poohed her humility, and kissed her behind the ear.

"Just you go on looking beautiful," he said. "You needn't worry your head about science, yet awhile, anyhow. Later on perhaps you'll get interested in what I'm aiming at and so on. Meanwhile there's the garden and a pretty good tennis-court, and our great old Common for sylvan walks with Voronoff, and we'll get the gramophone going in the evening and you'll see what a biologist can do with the Charleston when he really puts his mind to it, to say nothing of his feet."

"It all sounds splendid," said Margaret cheerfully.

Inside her mind, somewhere down in her subconsciousness, —"the unverbalised" as Viola called it—there was a faint sinister suggestion that married life in a house of science was going to be rather austere and perhaps a little lonely—a spiritual loneliness if she didn't get interested in Hesketh's research work. She must try to do that at all costs. Of course, there would always be those walks with Voronoff on Wimbledon Common, and perhaps her feet might harden to the trampling of Hesketh when she tried to teach him the Charleston which he enjoyed so much. Dear old Hesketh! What a boy he was for all his science! She was going to be wonderfully happy with his love. Nothing could spoil that. And Cyril and Viola were really amusing.

Then there was Hesketh's father, Grand-dad as the others called him, a courteous and charming old man as tall as Hesketh, and with almost as straight a back, with a finely cut face and parchment skin and kindly humorous eyes. A great scientist like Hesketh, but absorbed in the mysteries of atoms and electrons and all the manifestations of radio-activity instead of in biology and bio-chemistry like Hesketh and Cyril. He greeted her on that night of her arrival with an old-fashioned courtesy which won her heart.

"My dear," he said, "it's going to be a very great joy to

us to have your pretty face in this house. You'll find us all rather absorbed in our work—it seems rather important to us!—but we like laughter and youth and loveliness which give a gladness to life. I'm getting an old man—alas, alas! —but I still know beauty when I see it."

He raised her hand to his lips and then held it for a moment and patted it.

"Hesketh is a lucky young man," he said. "But he's a good fellow too, without guile, and I'm proud of him. You'll find him an agreeable husband."

"Well done, father!" said Hesketh, emitting his high note of mirth. "I feel as if you'd made me a Fellow of the Royal Society."

"So you may be one day," said the old man, who was one himself, as Margaret knew from Hesketh, who had a wonderful reverence for his father.

XVI

"THE garden is the great thing about this house," said Viola next day. "It's our Tom Tiddler's ground where we can get back to nature and do anything we jolly well like, climb trees, dance about with nothing on, lie about in hammocks, play tennis if we feel strenuous, or eat our meals out of doors, weather permitting. Come and be introduced to all its glories."

It was a good garden of two or three acres, although there was no sign of any gardener, or any gardening. The paths were overgrown by weeds and the flower-beds were tangled masses of Michaelmas daisies in another undergrowth of weeds. But there were some fine old trees—a giant copper beech, and an ancient mulberry tree with its great limbs propped up by crutches, and several spreading oaks with their foliage turning to russet and gold—and long stretches of stubbly grass which would have made very good lawns if they had been mown now and then. At the bottom of the garden was a pond, rather slimy and stagnant, from which Hesketh obtained his tadpoles and frogs for experimental purposes, and across a wooden bridge was a bathing pool about twice the size of an ordinary bath lined with blue tiles, which Viola pointed out with pride and satisfaction.

"Cyril and I prefer this to the bathroom," she explained, "except in the depth of winter. It's good to feel the wind playing on one's body. It jips one up and saves bad temper at breakfast. You ought to make a habit of it."

"I think I prefer the privacy of a bathroom," said Margaret firmly.

"Your loss," answered Viola carelessly. "Come and have

a look at the rabbit hutches and the monkey house—father's pets, poor dears."

The old stables of a house which had once belonged to a city merchant with a carriage and pair had been turned into a menagerie mostly for rabbits and guinea-pigs and rats with a monkey house at one end. A youth with sandy hair and freckles, introduced as "Jem," was cleaning the place out and nodded shyly to his new mistress.

Margaret held her breath for a moment because of the reek and warmth of this animal house. It was worse than the Zoo, she thought, this mingled stench of rats and rabbits and sad-looking monkeys.

"How's Trotsky this morning?" asked Viola.

"Bad," said the sandy-haired boy. "Won't live a couple of days more, I'd say."

"Poor dear Trotsky!" said Viola brightly. "And he used to be so frisky. Well, well, he's a martyr to science and ought to have a memorial put up to him. Died for humanity. What nobler death?"

"What's the matter with him?" asked Margaret, looking pitifully at a little brown monkey which sat curled up in a separate cage like a sick old man, very sorry for himself. Its eyes exuded mucus and stared out upon the world in a dull cretinous lack-lustre look. Its strangely human hands hung limply over its curled-up legs and it seemed to have a difficulty in breathing.

"Deficiency of thyroid," explained Viola. "Father has been making some tests which he thinks are rather important. Those ductless glands! See that restless little laddie in the next cage?"

There was another brown monkey dashing about madly, gibbering and shaking its bars.

"Over-stimulation of the thyroid," said Viola. "The cause of a lot of crime and neurasthenia among humans. These ductless glands play the very devil if the secretions are excited or diminished, as the case may be. Alter one's

whole character, play on one's passions and so forth. But I expect you know all about them, after studying biology at Oxford."

"I didn't get as far as ductless glands—in detail," said Margaret humbly. "I've only just glanced at Hesketh's book."

Viola smiled and shrugged her shoulders.

"So much the better for you! Father will bore you stiff with them before he's done with you. He has great theories on the subject—how to create the kingdom of heaven on earth, by scientific control of one's internal chemistry. Great stuff! I've been brought up on it."

She laughed, standing there with her legs apart and her hands in her pockets.

"Father lets his imagination rip at times. You'll get to know him later on. Cyril and I take off fifty per cent discount when he begins to prophesy."

Margaret stared at the rabbits—some of them eating voraciously, others off their feed, many looking starved and debilitated, and some excessively plump and self-satisfied. In one cage two big rabbits were fighting furiously so that the fur flew, much to Viola's amusement.

"Fighting like cave men for their mate," she said. "I expect father has been restoring their jaded youth. They're old 'uns really, but revitalised by a little operation. Steinach, you know, and pretty wonderful!"

"Yes," said Margaret.

Her eyes wandered off to that little brown monkey called Trotsky. Exactly like a little old man dying in the last stage of senility, and terribly pathetic. Its dull eyes haunted her. There was something horrible in a way about all these poor animals being used by Hesketh for his experiments. She rather wished he didn't have to do it. But, of course, it was all in the cause of Science—for the benefit of the human race. Hesketh wouldn't do anything unkind unless for high motives, she was certain of that. . . . But she wondered

sometimes if Science were going to make the human race any happier and better than it had been when people believed more in God. . . . Well, that was heresy in this house at Wimbledon!

It was just after breakfast and Hesketh came across the garden in his bedroom slippers with a dressing-gown over his pyjamas and a pipe in his mouth.

"Well, lady Margaret!" he said cheerily, "what do you think of my menagerie? . . . A house full of pets for you, eh?"

"Trotsky's dying," she said. "I'm so sorry for him."

Hesketh was amused by the tragedy of her voice which she tried and failed to hide.

"Poor old cousin Trotsky!" he said. "He's done great service to the cause of Science, and I'll reward him by a certain immortality in my paper on the ductless glands. Now his vitality has run down, and I doubt whether I can patch him up again. There's a limit until we get to know a bit more. That's what I'm working at."

"Poor creature!" said Margaret, referring to Trotsky again.

Well, she had come home and would soon get used to this house of science.

XVII

HESKETH'S father—Henry Jerningham, F.R.S.—had his own workshop as he called it next to his bedroom on the ground floor. It had once been a billiard-room for that city merchant who had originally built this house in the mid-Victorian era—Hesketh often referred to him (it was a family joke) as "our Philistine predecessor"—but now it was crowded with strange and dangerous-looking machines, dynamos, electric coils, glass tubes, scales and balances, mirrors, lantern reflectors, and other instruments completely mysterious and rather alarming to Margaret when she entered this room for the first time.

The old man invited her to see his "toys," as he called them, and explained the meaning of some of them in simple language which no doubt he thought made everything perfectly clear, although behind their simplicity lay tremendous mysteries which she could not even attempt to understand. It was even more difficult than biology. She pretended to listen, did listen indeed with strained attention to words which had no meaning to her, but all the time she was noticing little human things which had nothing to do with the old man's explanations. She noticed how delicate and transparent his hands were, so that every little vein was visible, and how they trembled slightly when he held a photograph for her to see—he had innumerable photographs like sunspots and flashes of lightning, and little explosive points of light along lines of radiance spreading out from some central sun or star—which had something to do with atomic energy and radio-activity and electrons "flung off, my dear, from the nucleus of the atom," and alpha rays, and beta rays, and

gamma rays, whatever they might be. And she noticed that though his hands trembled like that, he was wonderfully deft when he touched his instruments and played with those "toys" of his. As dainty as an old woman doing fine needlework. He was not much like Hesketh, she thought, more like a bishop who came to her father's house sometimes, with faint innumerable wrinkles in his parchment-like skin and thin lips which smiled with a kind of irony, not unkind. His false teeth were rather loose and he touched them now and again to put them back into place.

He switched off the lights except a little red lamp and set one of his machines working. She heard a crackle of electricity and saw Mr. Jerningham's figure bending over a glass tube which began to glow with an intense luminosity.

"There it is!" he said, but she didn't know in the least what it was.

He showed her a phosphorescent screen on which there appeared a number of scintillations.

"Look!" he exclaimed excitedly out of the darkness as though observing the phenomenon for the first time. "Those are the flying alpha particles colliding now and then with the nuclei of other atoms, knocking protons out of them. A terrific bombardment. Much more important to humanity than the Battles of the Somme. Possibly more destructive one day. That's the devil of it, my dear!"

She wondered what it had to do with the Battles of the Somme, which she remembered as a vague chapter of history in her childhood.

He showed her a queer toy made of wires and ping-pong balls with an india-rubber ball (much bigger than the ping-pong balls) in the centre of this arrangement.

"You see how perfectly simple it is," Mr. Jerningham explained. "There's an atom. That india-rubber ball is the central nucleus of positive protons and negative electrons squeezed together, so to speak. Those ping-pong balls fixed to the wires are negative electrons."

He picked up a ruler lying on the table.

"Here's an alpha ray," he said, "shot out from a radio-active mass. Whack! Off goes an electron."

Certainly one of the ping-pong balls was hit off its wire and was chased by a little black kitten which had been lying on a cushion by the fire, and went rolling across the bare boards until it hit the leg of a table and bounced back to the great delight of the kitten who sped after it eagerly. But what on earth did it all mean? Margaret was completely puzzled, she deplored her dreadful ignorance of science.

"How big is an electron?" she asked, pulling herself together, after laughing at the kitten.

It seemed that an electron is a very small thing.

"Not large," said Mr. Jerningham with a chuckle. "In the tiniest speck of dust hardly visible there are a thousand million million atoms. But an electron is infinitely smaller, and compared with the size of an atom like a gnat flying round a very large cathedral—a cathedral without walls, in a very definite orbit like a planet revolving round the sun."

Margaret took the kitten up from the floor and pressed it to her cheek. How warm and fluffy was that little body of life!

"An atom is a universe in itself," said Mr. Jerningham, looking at her thoughtfully and ignoring the kitten. "The universe is only a larger atom. Perhaps there are billions of universes. Strange thought! . . . Big or small. It's only a question of relativity."

"Are we all made up of atoms and electrons?" asked Margaret, like a very small child asking intelligent questions. "I mean, isn't there anything else which makes up matter?"

"Matter is energy," said Mr. Jerningham, "when you get down to it. Nothing but energy at the ultimate analysis. Everything we touch—just a whirl of electrons—those gnats in the cathedral without walls!"

He smiled at her rather tenderly as though looking at her

from that aspect and finding her arrangement of electrons beautiful and amusing.

"Where does the spirit come in?" asked Margaret, thinking very hard, trying to grasp some of these mysteries.

"The spirit?"

He seemed perplexed by that question—rather startled by it.

"The spirit?" he said again. "Does it come in? Oliver Lodge seems to think so. Talks a lot of stuff about etheric waves, universal intelligence, spirit force. I can't follow him. I haven't got as far as that. I'm a physicist, you know, following up the early discoverers of radio-activity."

Margaret sat silent, watching him beneath her eyelashes as he sat in front of her making a cigarette very carefully with some loose tobacco and a tiny piece of paper.

"You don't object to smoking?" he asked courteously.

She didn't object, and smiled when he said how much he liked to have her there, and let her thoughts wander on the subject of this married life which was just beginning for her. She had married into a family of scientists knowing nothing of all the things that seemed so important to them. All she could bring to Hesketh was her pretty face—he seemed to think it pretty—and her love. Would that be quite enough? Wouldn't he want more intellectual companionship presently, and find out what a duffer she was, and be impatient of her poor little brain? Even now after their honeymoon conversations he was beginning to keep away from those scientific ideas which always seemed to be at the back of his mind. He could see that she didn't understand. But she would try to get some idea. She would have to read and study so as to be able to talk to him reasonably and ask the right kind of questions, and take an intelligent interest. It would be hopeless to live in this house as a complete outsider, intellectually. Perhaps Cyril and Viola would help her, though she was afraid they would jeer at her.

Mr. Jerningham—she found it difficult to call him grand-

father just yet—was talking to her again. She would have to concentrate her attention, but it was all so difficult, although he kept on explaining its simplicity.

"They knocked us all edgewise—those early discoveries of radio-activity," he said. "They contradicted every known principle of physical science. Inexhaustible energy. Where did it come from? . . . Continual and spontaneous radiation. My word, that made us think pretty hard! It was in 1896—before you were born, my dear, but only yesterday to me—that my hair began to stand on end. Why, good gracious me, if we could liberate radio-activity by bombarding the nucleus of the atom we should get to the very source of illimitable energy! Imagine the force of those alpha particles—Rutherford's babies—shot out from the nucleus of an atom and travelling at the rate of ten thousand miles a second! Radium emanation gives out six million times as much heat from disintegrating nuclei as the same volume of oxygen and hydrogen burning together—and you know the heat of a blow-pipe flame. Get at the nucleus of the atom and you get at all the power that man wants to turn his engines, drive his ships, light his cities, fire his guns—yes, don't forget that, my dear!—and do all his dirty work, without the need of those coal-fields which they make such a fuss about, nowadays. . . . Well, that's what we're trying to do. That's the meaning of these little toys. We're not there yet, but we're getting close—hot on the scent. The chase for power! What a game! Better than tiddlywinks!"

She didn't understand a word he was saying, but she smiled brightly and said, "Wonderful!" She wanted to show her interest and be kind to this charming old gentleman who laughed and looked excited and gave little chuckles of ironical surprise at the marvels he was telling her. And, of course, they were marvellous. She could see that, though she couldn't understand them.

"I expect I'm boring you," he said, looking at her with a twinkling smile. "An old man's hobbies!"

That reminded her of Hesketh. He was always afraid he might bore her by his scientific talk.

"Not in the least," she assured him. "I'm frightfully interested—though of course it's very difficult."

"Won't you take a biscuit and a glass of sherry, my dear?" he asked, and insisted upon her eating a Garibaldi biscuit—fly biscuits she used to call them—though she refused the wine. He sipped his own after raising his glass to her with a touch of old-fashioned gallantry.

"Happy with Hesketh?" he said. "Treats you well, my dear? No complaints, eh?"

"Very happy," she answered, smiling. "He's a very kind husband."

"He was to his first wife," said Mr. Jerningham, "though she worried him to death. One of those suburban-minded women; all tennis parties and chatter. You know the sort? Still, her death was a shock to me, poor child. A touch of pneumonia—a week with the doctors and nurses (mostly fools), then dead. Terrible!"

"Tragic," said Margaret, though she always felt uncomfortable when there was any mention of Hesketh's first wife. That was foolish, but she couldn't help that little stab of jealous pain because Hesketh had loved some one else first.

XVIII

HESKETH avoided the society of his neighbours as though they were the victims of plague.

"My work and my home are good enough for me," he said. "Why dissipate one's energies in entertaining elderly colonels, or retired stockbrokers, or tennis-playing flappers who haven't an idea in their heads unless they've read it first in the *Morning Post?* And then get it all wrong."

Occasionally some of the neighbours had tried to invade this house of science by leaving cards, but the Jerningham family agreed that the only way to deal with that situation was to ignore these attempts at familiarity.

"Cheek, I call it," said Viola. "Why should they thrust their foolishness upon intelligent people like us?"

One of them invaded the house more violently. It was General Barbizon who lived next door with a depressed-looking wife—Margaret had watched her from the windows taking her two chows for a walk—and a son of sixteen or so who was at home with an attack of mumps. His swollen face could be seen staring out of an upstairs window looking on to the garden, and it was during this mump episode that his father gained admittance to the Jerninghams' house by terrorising the maid and demanding an interview with Hesketh.

"He insists on seeing you, sir," said Grace, the parlour maid. "Quite purple in the face, sir."

"Confound the old militarist," said Hesketh. "What on earth does he want?" It happened to be at breakfast time and Viola had just come in from her morning bath, so that her hair was still wet.

"I expect one of the monkeys has escaped and is making faces at those wretched chows," she said. "It happened before when the late lamented Trotsky smashed all the flower-pots in his greenhouse. Don't you remember, father?"

"I do indeed," said Hesketh. "It cost me a quid."

He wiped a touch of egg off his little straggling moustache and went into the next room, leaving the door open.

Viola and Margaret heard his quiet greeting of "Good morning, General," and the sudden rasp of a military gentleman's voice addressing, it seemed, a battalion on parade.

"Good morning be damned!"

"I'm afraid I can't oblige you," said Hesketh. "Can you suggest any other way in which I can help?"

"I shall put the police on to you, sir," said General Barbizon, "unless you restrain your daughter from walking about your garden in a state of abominable nudity."

"Wow!" said Viola, raising her eyebrows at Margaret. "How priceless!"

"What's your objection?" asked Hesketh sharply. "It's a private garden. Mine, as it happens."

"I refuse to permit the morals of my young son to be perverted by such a disgusting exhibition," said General Barbizon excitedly.

Viola was listening with an aid of intense interest and amusement.

"Good and great," she whispered.

Hesketh said something about "Peeping Tom" and the end of his sentence was inaudible. Then he raised his voice and spoke angrily.

"Tell your nasty little son to keep his eyes shut if he doesn't want them bunged up. As for you, General, I'm surprised that a man with white hair should encourage such a schoolboy sense of indecency. I'll trouble you to clear out of my house."

There were additional words from the General, extremely

heated. He mentioned the word police again, more than once. Then he retired stormily and banged the front door.

"Can you conceive of such narrow-mindedness, such a nasty and abominable prudishness?" asked Hesketh, returning with a flushed face.

Viola laughed until she had tears in her eyes.

"It's too comical for words!" she cried. "It's unbelievable. Doesn't the old man ever look at his own body?"

Margaret refrained from entering into an argument. Privately she sympathised with their next-door neighbour. She did not approve of Viola's indifference to clothes. Her own traditions, her own instincts, made her all for privacy and concealment of the human body. "I'm hopelessly early Victorian," she thought. "I'll never cure myself."

XIX

HESKETH'S father invited Margaret into his workshop again and asked her to sit down after shutting the door. He seemed to have something particular to say to her from one or two hints he dropped, but delayed his revelation until he had offered her a black-currant lozenge from the tin which he kept in a drawer. It put a check, he said, on his temptation to smoke so much.

Presently he looked over his glasses mysteriously and smiled at her.

"I'm going to tell you a secret," he said. "Something I've never told to any one. Not even to Hesketh. That's because you're a pretty woman. We old men—and the young ones too—crave for a touch of womanly comfort, now and then, and like to blurt things out, just as we used to as small boys to our mothers."

"Tell me," said Margaret. "I'll keep it secret."

He stared at her as though wondering if he might trust her.

"I'm afraid of death!" he said. "Isn't that silly?"

She did not think it silly. She thought it pitiful and sad. She was sorry that an old man like this—well, getting old—should be afraid of death. She thought it was only youth to whom the thought came with terror. Cyril had been gloomy in the catacombs because that thought had "discouraged" him.

"You see, I hate to stop my work," he said, "just as we're getting close to things—those atoms I was talking to you about. It's like falling off one's horse when the fox is in sight. I want to be in at the death. Silly, isn't it?"

He laughed at the silliness of it and then was serious again.

"It's curiosity," he explained. "I want to know what's going to happen to this extraordinary world of ours when Science has found out a bit more and put new and immeasurable powers into the hands of men, as it's doing now so rapidly. I want to know if Hesketh's right or if I'm right. It's like a tremendous bet, without knowing the result. I want to say to Hesketh, 'I told you so!' (He's rather cocksure, you know). Or I want to say, 'Well, you win, laddie. Man isn't such a fool as I thought he was, and your theories seem to be working out all right towards that Age of Reason and that beautiful millennium when man is master of his own destiny!'"

He laughed quietly and looked over his glasses again at Margaret.

"I expect you're on Hesketh's side," he said. "Of course, of course! That's as it should be."

She did not follow the drift of his remarks. What was this tremendous bet—this serious difference of opinion between father and son?

"In what way do you mean?" she asked timidly. "How do you think things are going to work out?"

He seemed surprised at her lack of understanding, until a light seemed to break on him.

"You and Hesketh have been too busy love-making for serious conversation. Honeymoon stuff, eh? But, the fact is, Hesketh and I don't see eye to eye. He's an optimist and a sentimentalist. He believes that the human mind and character are capable of improving themselves. He thinks the blind forces of evolution—so slow, so slow for his impatience!—may be changed and speeded up by biological knowledge. He's all for birth control, scientific education, the elimination of the unfit, the directing of emotions and intelligence by modifying the chemical action of internal secretions which affect the way men think and behave. That's his line of enquiry. That's his beautiful philosophy and devout hope. Well, all I can say is that he's got to be

very quick, or my branch of science is going to make a fool of him. A new heaven on earth—pretty quick—or world ruin and the big smash."

All this sounded very mysterious and important. Margaret felt that she was getting a revelation which she ought to be glad to know. But not even dimly could she guess how Mr. Jerningham's electrons and Hesketh's hormones and chromosomes—weren't those the words Hesketh was always using?—could possibly lead to world ruin or a new heaven on earth.

"How do you mean exactly?" she asked, and was pleased with that word "exactly," which did not give her away too much. It made her question seem less like an acknowledgment of complete ignorance.

Mr. Jerningham laughed at some secret ironical thought of his own.

"It's as clear as sunlight," he explained, "though nobody seems aware of it. None of those young people who walk about the streets of London and go to the 'pictures' and read the sporting news, and make love, and have babies, and all the rest of it, without a notion that civilisation is likely to crash beneath their feet unless they take things more seriously."

It reminded her of something Hesketh had said on that afternoon at Oxford when she had gone for her first walk with him. "Civilisation must reshape itself or go under." Something like that.

The little black kitten was playing with its tail on her lap. It was Mr. Jerningham's playful "familiar," like the black cat of a witch. She gathered it in both hands and held it against her breast. This little kitten wasn't worrying. Perhaps it was best not to worry.

"Why should it crash?" she asked—meaning civilisation.

He raised his hands—his thin transparent hands—with a gesture of humorous despair.

"Nothing can stop it except a higher standard of intelli-

gence. And I see no sign of that. No sign whatever. Humanity is still in the cave-man stage of mentality. The same old passions, the same old fetishes, the same old cruelties—slightly hidden under modern clothing."

He sat thinking deeply for a few moments before he spoke again with a kind of ironical anger.

"Stupendous ignorance everywhere, my dear. Civil strife and international hatreds. Tariff walls, industrial competition, preparedness for war (wonderful word that!) and increasing armaments. Just cave men and women who read the *Daily Express* and think themselves mightily intelligent."

He looked at Margaret and winked and repeated those words "mightily intelligent," and was silent again for a few seconds, before he resumed his monologue.

"Meanwhile, fellows like me—physicists and chemists—(we ought to be killed, really, my dear!) have put tremendous powers in their hands, enormous machines, frightful engines of destruction, poison gases, wireless beams, aeroplanes, and presently—beyond a doubt—the liberation of atomic energy with its illimitable, inexhaustible supplies of force. The mentality of cave men with the powers of gods—a pretty mess they'll make, don't you think? Children playing with hell fire—do you think we can trust them? Our little Chamberlains and Poincarés? Our bald-headed Stresemanns and Ludendorffs? Our yapping little Communists in Hyde Park? Our public-school patriots and our disease-stricken slum dwellers? Where is the wisdom in them to handle the thunderbolts of Jove and the toys of the Elemental Furies?"

Margaret found herself unable to answer these questions. He did not seem to expect her to do so. He laughed as though seeing a cosmic jest.

"Hesketh," he said, "thinks he can bring about the Age of Reason by playing on their internal secretions and winding up their brain boxes. Well, it's a race between biology and physics. Good luck to Hesketh, I say, but I doubt it.

. . . I'd like to live long enough to see what happens. Very interesting. Nothing else matters."

Margaret rose from her chair and placed the little kitten very carefully on the hassock by the fireplace.

"Viola and I are going shopping," she said gently. "Thank you very much, Mr. Jerningham. But it's all rather alarming, isn't it?"

He had quite forgotten her presence. He recalled her with a start, as though he had wakened out of a dream.

"Yes," he said. "Yes, you go and do your shopping, my dear. Buy some pretty things. Your beauty is a joy to us in this old house."

He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"Atoms—electrons—alpha-rays—why should I inflict my hobbies on a lovely lady like you? How foolish of me! How selfish is old age!"

He patted her hand and then said an anxious word or two, as though remembering some indiscretion.

"Don't say anything to the others about that little secret of mine! My foolish fear of death! All nonsense!"

Margaret left him among his instruments. In Wimbledon High Street with Viola she bought some silk stockings. The pavement was crowded with short-frocked girls, all very merry and bright, and young mothers wheeling perambulators, and school children chattering and laughing as they passed the lighted shops. They were unconscious of the doom prophesied by Mr. Jerningham.

"Viola," she said, "do you think the world is hurrying on to ruin?"

That young lady laughed loudly, and startled an old lady ahead of her by this sudden outburst of boisterous mirth.

"Grandfather has been talking to you. A prophet of Woe and the Universal Smash!"

"Does it worry you at all?" asked Margaret. "You understand these things better than I do, I expect."

"Brought up on it," said Viola. "But I'm not worrying.

Whatever happens is going to be tremendously amusing. If it's ruin you'll see me laughing 'midst the ruins! . . . But I'm on father's side. Men like gods and women like—well—me."

She bought a bottle of acid tablets to suck while she studied Julian Huxley's latest book on the religion of a scientist.

"Jolly good stuff," she said—meaning the book.

XX

IT was not until a week after Margaret's home-coming to Wimbledon that her father and mother returned from their holiday in France with her brother Guy. She wanted to take Hesketh to tea or dinner with them the day after their arrival, but he pleaded some rather important work and suggested that anyhow it would be more amusing for her to go without him this time as she would be able to speak more freely to her own people.

"They'll want to know what sort of a husband I am and whether I'm a wife-beater or a Bluebeard. You might have to be insincere if I stood by you with the fatuous smile of Mr. Newly Wed."

That was his nonsense and a flimsy excuse for postponing social relations with her family of whom he seemed to be rather nervous—his ecclesiastical father-in-law as he called him—because he might raise some theological argument and force Hesketh to be rude to him.

"Heaps of time for tea-cakes and talky-talky," said Hesketh, and then, slightly conscience-stricken perhaps, put his arm about her and said, "Of course I'll come if you like, O most wonderful of wives, but it's true about that work of mine. I'm preparing a paper for the British Ass." He meant the British Association.

She let him off that time and went up to Town alone that afternoon and took a taxi from Waterloo Station to her father's vickerage—her old home in Lowndes Place, Belgrave Square.

It was queer how her heart beat at the sight of those late Victorian houses of stucco built for people who had been immensely rich before the war and were now letting them

to Americans and the New Rich (so her father said) to save income-tax and pay for holidays on the Riviera. This was her world, before her marriage to a professor of biology. As a little girl, before going to that school at Eastbourne, she had walked round these squares and crescents with nursemaids who had taught her not to run after adorable kittens or to pat strange dogs, or to step into puddles, like her brother Guy—two years younger and a very naughty little boy at that time, utterly refusing to behave according to the code of manners laid down by nursemaids who had always been with "good families." Later there had been governesses with whom she walked demurely in this world of stucco houses, Miss Truslove, most adorable among them, because she had stayed longest and left ineffaceable memories in Margaret's mind. It was Miss Truslove, the daughter of a country clergyman, who had first taught her that her father was a very remarkable man.

"One of England's saints," said Miss Truslove. "He might have been a great General, or Prime Minister of England, but your dear father devotes himself—all his knowledge and intellectual greatness—to the service of God in Belgravia. One day he is bound to be a Bishop."

That prophecy had not been fulfilled, and others by Miss Truslove had failed equally. The Kaiser had not been hanged. Guy had not gone into the Navy in spite of his passion for sailing boats on the Round Pond in Kensington Gardens, and Margaret had not married a handsome young peer (purely mythical) with immense wealth which he desired to devote to social service after listening to one of Canon Allport's inspiring sermons. But from poor Miss Truslove Margaret had learnt to read *Peter Pan* and *Puck of Pook's Hill* and other books which had been the delight of her childhood. And from this thin-chested, pale-faced girl who suffered from a perpetual cold in the head and chronic indigestion, and a slightly inflamed nose, she had been initiated into the mystery and splendour and agony of love.

As a secret, not to be mentioned to the maidservants, Miss Truslove had confided to Margaret that she was engaged to a second-lieutenant in the West Yorkshires. His name was Ernest Biggs, and he had enlisted on the very first day of the war as a private. Now he was an officer in the British Army fighting for civilisation against those dreadful Huns, and all his men were devoted to him. Margaret was twelve years old when Miss Truslove showed her the portrait of this young man, who was not very good-looking, though he wore khaki and a Sam Browne belt.

"My lover—my hero!—" said Miss Truslove, and her face was transfigured so that Margaret was almost frightened by the beauty of it. At least there was something wonderfully beautiful in her eyes, and Margaret forgot that her nose was still inflamed.

"I want you to pray for him every night," said Miss Truslove. "He will be out there in the trenches looking over No Man's Land. If you will help me to pray for him Our Lord will keep him safe. I'm sure of it!"

"But everybody's praying for their men and yet they get killed all the same," said Margaret, not in any spirit of scepticism but with a child's desire to understand difficult riddles.

"Some go through the worst battles without a scratch," said Miss Truslove. "It's because some tremendous love reaches out to them. If we pray for them hard enough nothing can touch them. Nothing!"

She had spoken with mystical certainty which impressed Margaret with a sense of awe. So every night during the last year of the war she had prayed for Ernest Biggs, and every morning she and Miss Truslove looked at the little flags on the war map and moved them according to the day's news, although it was disappointing when they had to be moved backwards in March of 1918. Then one day, a few weeks before the end of the war, Miss Truslove had a telegram, and gave a wailing cry and wept a terrible passion of

grief in the nursery with Margaret standing there frightened and kissing her wet face. All their prayers had not saved Ernest Biggs, and after that Miss Truslove went home and had influenza and died. But Margaret was quite sure that she had died of a broken heart, and as a child she became frightened of this love which hurt so much. Now she had married Hesketh and would be hurt like Miss Truslove if he were taken from her . . .

These memories of her former governess, that awareness of love's sword of pain, came to her mind as the taxi drove through Belgrave Square bringing her back into the old atmosphere of her girlhood, in this sheltered neighbourhood with its tall, well-furnished houses, and rich people. A Rolls-Royce drove up to the house next door. Two girls in riding-breeches were standing by their horses with the riding-master smiling down upon them from his own hack, after a canter in the Park. Margaret used to do that before she went up to Oxford and married Hesketh. It was the same riding-master and he lifted his hat to her. Everything was exactly the same except that she was a married woman and utterly different—changed somehow in mind and looking at life with different eyes, more doubtfully, without the same childish faith, with a desire, rather more urgent, to understand its riddles.

XXI

"OH, miss!—ma'am, I mean," said Beatrice the parlour-maid, in a short black frock with black silk stockings and the tiniest of white caps.

She was excited and emotional at the sight of Margaret as a married woman. As a frequent visitor to the "movies" on her afternoons "off" she still had a romantic faith in love and marriage, though she had been jilted by a young man in the grocery department of Harrods, as once she had confided to Margaret in a storm of tears over the breakfast-table.

"I do hope you're happy," she said in the friendliest way. "It's an awful risk for young ladies nowadays, with so many divorces about and all that."

Margaret said she was wonderfully happy and not likely to get divorced just yet.

"Is father in?" she asked. "Or mother, or Mr. Guy?"

Her father, it appeared, was in his study, her mother was at a meeting and would be back to tea, and Mr. Guy had gone out in his motor-car after lunch with a young lady—Miss Errington—who had called for him.

Everything was exactly the same except Margaret. Her father was in his study, her mother was at a meeting—she wondered if it were Theosophy or Spiritualism this time—and Guy was out with one of those girls who made a dead set at him because of his nice smile and thoughtful eyes. They little knew that most of them bored him exceedingly and that he was utterly indifferent to their admiration, being much more interested in mediæval art, French poetry of the seventeenth century, fencing at Bertrand's, and his work at the Slade School.

Margaret went up to the bedroom that had been hers before her marriage. Nothing had been touched or altered. All her photographs were there—Betty Winter, Hypatia Hill, Camilla Jessop, of Somerville, girls who had been to school with her at Eastbourne, Guy in various stages of growth from sailor suits upwards, and poor Miss Truslove with a cold in her head—even the photograph showed that. There was her bookshelf with *Peter Pan* and *Puck of Pook's Hill,* and gilt-edged prizes for Old Testament history, and novels by Compton Mackenzie, Joseph Conrad, and Rose Macaulay, who had introduced her to a wider and wilder world than Belgrave Square or Eastbourne. By the side of her bed was the prayer-book which had been given to her by Miss Marston, the head-mistress, with a life of St. Francis of Assisi, and over her bed was a little crucifix which her father had brought years ago from Jerusalem after a holiday in Palestine. It was made out of wood from the Mount of Olives, and her father had been very cross with Miss Lampson, a former governess of austere Protestant principles, for suggesting that a crucifix was only used by Roman Catholic idolaters. Perhaps that was why Miss Lampson had left shortly afterwards in tears and a taxi as Margaret had seen her from the nursery window.

This room held Margaret's ghost, she thought, the ghost of herself as she had grown physically and mentally since childhood, before that jump away to Hesketh and his house of science. It was in this room that she had prayed for Ernest Biggs, that unknown soldier of the Great War who had symbolised in her imagination all the other heroes. In this room she had had nightmares of strange terrors, and later dreams of beautiful young men, like her heroes D'Artagnan and Brigadier Gerard, in love with her, and later still, on holidays from Eastbourne, dreams and emotional crises and sudden inexplicable rushes of tearfulness, and moods of ecstasy and elation in which she seemed to be very close to God, or thrilled through by a sensitive awareness of beauty

and life, or expectant of the enormous adventure of love for which all her body and soul seemed to be waiting. She had seen her lover sometimes in these day-dreams, not at all like the boys who came to the house with Guy—Harrow boys, most of them, and rather shy in her presence—or the young men who helped her father with his working boys' club, rather shabby and unromantic, but a shining, knightly, mystical figure, inspired, she was sure, with very high ideals, and dedicated to some great spiritual service, of which Miss Marston, her head-mistress, would very heartily approve. That was the ghost of Margaret Allport before she had gone to Oxford and married a biologist old enough to be her father.

How impossible to believe, now that she was back in this bedroom, that she was the wife of Professor Hesketh Jerningham, with a little bald place at the back of his head. Or else how impossible to believe that seven weeks ago she had still been Margaret Allport! On the whole the first was more difficult now that she was in her old home. Everything was so cosy and comfortable and rich—yes, rich and luxurious—compared with Hesketh's house at Wimbledon. The carpets on the stairs seemed wonderfully soft. This bedroom of hers was very dainty with its satin-wood furniture and silk curtains, not like her new bedroom with its bare boards, curtainless windows, and grey blanketed beds —"suitable for soldiers"—as she had told Hesketh. Down the staircase were the steel engravings of Rome by Piranesi which she had grown up with as a child. There was a fire burning in her father's study and the windows were shut—Viola would have opened every one with a gasp of horror—and a soft rosy light from shaded lamps glowed on the water colours and miniatures which her father had collected years ago.

XXII

HE was sitting there at his desk writing his sermon for Sunday, as she had seen him so many times on Saturday afternoons. The light from his desk lamp shone on his strong clear-cut profile with its straight nose and full double chin creased over his collar. His hair was only white at the temples and he was not a little bit bald like Hesketh.

"Well, father!" said Margaret. "Sorry to interrupt you."

He let his pen drop and swung around in his swivel chair, surprised by her silent entrance.

"God bless my soul! I didn't hear you come in. . . . But I'm glad to be interrupted—you know how I hate writing sermons!"

She kissed him with a sudden sense of emotion,—this handsome father whom she had always loved with a little fear because of his quiet irony and love of teasing, and aloofness from her daily life. He had been too busy as a rule to see much of Guy and her, and had always seemed rather glad when they went back to school. But he was glad to see her now, and patted her arm when she bent over him.

"Well, my darling. How do you like being married to a scientist? It was a disappointment to your mother and me not to be at your wedding. But I had made all arrangements for that little trip, and you were in a dreadful hurry."

"Hesketh was!" she answered.

He looked at her with the old teasing spirit in his eyes.

"So you call him Hesketh? It will take me a long time to be so familiar with my distinguished son-in-law. I shall call him Professor until I get to know him a bit better. . . . I've read most of his books. Brilliant and convincing—on the whole—but rather unsettling to simple souls, perhaps."

"He doesn't believe in God," said Margaret, simply.

Canon Allport was not staggered by this revelation of his son-in-law's lack of faith.

"No?" he answered mildly. "Well, that's going rather far, isn't it, even for a scientist? Of course, one has to define one's terms."

Margaret was silent for a moment. She was anxious to discuss the subject of religion with her father. She would like to know, one day, exactly what he did believe and how he reconciled his own teaching with his acceptance of modern science. But somehow she shirked that enquiry on this first afternoon.

"How's mother?" she asked.

"Very well, I believe," said her father, as though not quite certain about his wife's state of health. "Lots of committee meetings and so on. At the moment she is an ardent disciple of the British Israelites."

He smiled with a tolerance to all forms of belief which came from a sense of intellectual superiority to the fanaticisms of less cultured souls.

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Margaret. "Who on earth are they?"

"Oh, they're not new!" explained her father. "I remember them years ago proving to their own satisfaction that the British people are descended from the lost tribes of Israel. Preposterous nonsense! Lately they have linked up with some prophecies based on the Egyptian pyramids. I'm not very clear what it's all about, but your mother is getting excited on the subject. It keeps her happy, and gives me more time for reading. By the by, I picked up a wonderful bargain in Tours. An early copy of *Aucassin et Nicolette*. Perfect condition, and not enormously expensive."

He showed it to her and afterwards pulled out some prints he had picked up in a bookstall at Poitiers. That reminded him that he had enjoyed some quite wonderful wine in the hotel there, a lovely full-flavoured Burgundy which was worth its weight in gold though only fifteen francs a bottle.

He had been tempted to bring some home, but of course the journey would probably spoil it.

"How's Guy?" asked Margaret. "I'm longing to see him."

"Guy's all right," he told her. "Doing good work at the Slade School and writing some excellent verse in his spare time. In my opinion he has the literary gift more than the artistic. But still, it's all very precarious. Art—literature—far better go into business and get a steady job!"

"Has he fallen in love since I've been away?" asked Margaret, laughing a little. "All those girls make such a fuss of him, but he seems indifferent."

Her father smiled and put the tips of his fingers together as he leaned back in his swivel-chair.

"That's the strange thing about modern boys and girls. I don't profess to understand them. Some of them seem quite sexless. Others sex-mad. As far as Guy is concerned, I must say that nothing seems to worry him. He goes out with those little hussies at all times of the day and night and doesn't seem to care tuppence for any of them, except as agreeable companions. A new phenomenon in life, this boy-and-girl comradeship, without passion or sentiment. Not good in my opinion, but then I'm old-fashioned and out of date."

"I'm not sure that passion doesn't leap out at unexpected moments," said Margaret after a moment's introspection. "And then perhaps it's rather dangerous, I mean if there's no religion, father. What do you think?"

She was thinking of Viola, whom her father didn't know yet. Her father would be amused by Viola—that wild wood-nymph. She wondered what Guy would think of her.

"Well," said Canon Allport, "I don't know. I really don't know. . . . But I think I hear your mother. I'll join you at tea-time. This wretched sermon—"

He turned to his desk, pushing the papers about with his plump, well-shaped hands and beautifully tended nails—not like Hesketh's hands which were hard and thin and hairy, and not very clean sometimes when he had been working

in the laboratory. It was the first time she had noticed her father's hands like that. He was wonderfully good-looking and careful of himself.

"One has to write such nonsense!" he said. "For all those old women of both sexes. Insincere stuff, in a way, though I try to get something into it. . . . By the by, I'm having a lot of trouble with that fellow Halliday."

Margaret was aware of a faint blush creeping into her face. Mr. Halliday was her father's curate. Before going to Oxford she had sentimentalised about him. They had gone to the theatre together—matinées—now and then, and she had helped him with the Easter decorations and so on. He had been more like an elder brother.

"He disapproves of my sermons," said her father. "Doesn't think they're honest and accuses me of hedging. What impudence, eh? Had the cheek to tell me that I wasn't a Christian the other day, fairly and squarely. We had a row about it."

He laughed at the remembrance of this row as though he had had the best of it.

"I thought he was so devoted to you, Father!" exclaimed Margaret.

Her father shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"He has the temperament of a fanatic. I always suspected it under his mask of shyness. Something in his eyes and a tendency to asceticism. I dislike a fellow who doesn't drink wine. Now he has accepted a living in a slum parish and proposes to take the Church to the People. Salvation Army stuff! Christian democracy and all that nonsense. Bolshevism really, though he doesn't admit it. Belgravia isn't good enough for him. Thinks we're too smug and respectable. . . . Well, my dear—"

He turned back to his papers with a gesture of intellectual annoyance.

"I won't bother you, father," said Margaret. "See you at tea-time."

XXIII

"MY darling child!"

Her mother had greeted her warmly, effusively and yet with that air of being preoccupied with other and more important thoughts which Margaret had always remembered as characteristic of her. As the daughter of a Professor of History at Cambridge she had been born in an intellectual atmosphere which had made her take an enthusiastic interest in high things such as politics, German philosophy, the origins of art, the poetry of mysticism —much too difficult for Margaret—and the Oriental forms of religious belief. But it was difficult to know at any time exactly what was her latest conviction, because, as she said, she kept an open mind and pursued her enquiries relentlessly. For a time, as Margaret was vaguely aware during holidays from Eastbourne, she had been much absorbed in theosophical studies and talked a good deal about Kharma and reincarnation and a mysterious entity called by her Guru, who seemed to be some spiritual lover whom she shared with her earthly husband. It was all very perplexing to Margaret, and rather amusing in small quantities, though she had the highest respect for this little bird-like mother with her dark sparkling eyes—she had bequeathed them to Guy—and her conversational vivacity. Strange, Margaret thought, that she should be so stupid with such intellectual parents. She must be an exception to Hesketh's laws of heredity and acquired characteristics.

"Did you have a lovely and wonderful honeymoon?" asked her mother, and without waiting for an answer—one only had to listen—said some very beautiful things about that love between husband and wife which united their souls for

all eternity (she left divorce out of her argument) and made them as it were a single expression of the Universal Life force.

"Tell me, dear child," she asked, "does that brilliant husband of yours believe in the continuity of the life-stream and the cosmic understanding of the Absolute?"

"I'm afraid I haven't got quite as far as that, mother," answered Margaret, hedging a little. "But I hardly think he does. As far as I can make out—"

Fortunately her mother was not paying the slightest attention to what her answer might be. For a moment or two she was lost in some very deep and abstruse contemplation from which she emerged to take a toasted crumpet from the cake-stand.

"It's all very amazing," she said. "The evidence seems to me conclusive beyond all doubt. The date of the Crucifixion was foretold, and now we are going to have that Second Phase of Tribulation beginning on April 14th. I suppose your dear husband has warned you about it, Margaret?"

"About what, mother?" asked Margaret, completely baffled.

"It's all based on the inch," said Mrs. Allport, touching the tips of her fingers daintily on a tiny napkin after eating her crumpet. "The Anglo-Saxon race—the British Israelites—are the only peoples who use the inch as a standard of measurement. That points clearly to the fact that the ancient Egyptians had us in mind when they used the inch for all their wonderful prophecies which are symbolised in the Great Pyramid. Working up to the King's Chamber and using the interpretation of Mr. Davidson, who found it all out by mathematics and astronomical calculations, the history of the world is foretold in all its most important phases. The Great War on August 2nd, 1914, ending on November 11th, 1918. The Second Phase of Tribulation beginning in April, 1928, and ending—I forget the month in 1936, with the British Israelites—the "Brits" as they are called for short—tri-

umphant over the Beast. That is Russia, of course. . . . Pass me that pink cake, dearest."

Margaret passed her mother the pink cake.

"It all sounds very thrilling," she said, hiding a little smile of scepticism. "Where did you find it all out, mother?"

"Oh, it's all in the *Morning Post,*" said Mrs. Allport. "Surely you have read those amazing articles? They converted me instantly to the British Israelites and I have been attending their meetings. You have no idea how belief is spreading. We have already formed committees for first-aid and surgical bandages. Dear General Swope—our President—refuses to resign his command at Aldershot because he was through the Great War and he is not going to be left out of the Second Phase of Tribulation. It's very noble of him, though I must say some of the younger officers object to his blocking their promotion. . . . I wish your father would come into tea. He hates it cold—and he always keeps it waiting. . . . Ah, there he is!"

"Struggling with that dreadful sermon," said Canon Allport with a tragi-comical smile. "Trying to reconcile Christianity and Science without alarming the old ladies or playing into the hands of the infidels. . . . Do I see muffins?"

He did, and ate three between his cups of tea, with an appetite that had not been spoilt by literary wrestlings.

"Tell us about your honeymoon in Italy," he said to Margaret. "Did you see the Eros of Praxiteles in the Vatican Museum?"

Margaret did not remember that work of art. She had seen so many statues and pictures that they remained in her memory only as a general and muddled impression of beautiful things in a world that went alarmingly naked, like Viola in her wood-nymph moods. But in any case there was no chance of telling her father much about that holiday in Italy, because several ladies "dropped in" to tea and became very excited about the film picture of Ben Hur which they had just seen.

"Most beautiful and most reverent!" said one of them. "It ought to bring a great message to the mind of the masses. I think it's wonderful propaganda against Bolshevism."

"I'm afraid most people go for the chariot races," said Canon Allport with his smiling scepticism. "It's a wonder they don't bet on it. That and the fight between the galleys, which reminds me of the gallant British Navy and the Nelson touch."

"Oh, Canon!" cried one of the ladies. "What dreadful things you do say!"

"Not nearly so dreadful as the things I think, Lady Barbara," said the Canon blandly, regarding that lady's knees which were over-exposed perhaps, considering her age and piety, though he wasn't a prude in these matters.

The chatter of the ladies continued brightly. Margaret listened and smiled and made the necessary little noises and all the time was thinking how funny it was to be sitting here in this lovely drawing-room—her mother's taste was exquisite—just as if she hadn't a husband in that bare house at Wimbledon with wind howling through the windows and a menagerie of sick beasts in the garden. She wondered how long Guy would be. She was longing to see him and have a heart-to-heart talk with him.

But it was Mr. Halliday, her father's curate, who came in first, and she was glad to see him too, though a little shy, because she remembered how sentimental she had been for a time about the young clergyman.

"Welcome home!" he said, and held her hand in a tight grip for a moment.

He was much older than she was, having been in the war—the last year of it—before joining the Church. That would make him over thirty, she reckoned, comparing him with Hesketh. Much younger, of course, than Hesketh and not so confident and distinguished-looking. He was delicate and thin and looked as if a puff of wind might blow him away, but there was something strong in his face as though his spirit

burned intensely behind his ascetic features. He had won the D.S.O. in the war as a front-line soldier so that he certainly had courage. . . . She noticed that his cuffs were frayed and that his boots wanted mending. Probably he was very poor or else did not spend any money on himself. He listened for a time to the ladies, gravely, and intently as though trying to concentrate on any sense that might flow from their lips, but not with success. Once or twice he glanced at Canon Allport somewhat anxiously, as though remembering that "row" when he had suggested that the Canon was not a Christian. Perhaps he had gone too far about that. Presently he moved to another chair next to Margaret, and spoke to her under the cover of the general conversation which was being kept up brightly by Lady Barbara Errington.

"I'm afraid this will be my last time at tea here," he said. "I'm moving down the social scale! The slums of Fulham."

"Isn't it rather rash of you?" asked Margaret. "What's wrong with Belgravia and St. Jude's, and my father?"

"I prefer the front-line trenches," he answered. "Besides, your father doesn't agree with my point of view. I quite see that I ought to go."

Margaret laughed at him quietly.

"Isn't it you that doesn't agree with my father's point of view? You said he wasn't a Christian."

He seemed rather shocked at that reminder.

"Oh, Lord," he said, "I wish he hadn't told you that. It was unpardonable. I see that now. Please forgive me."

"Father's very cross with you!" she told him. She didn't see that she herself had anything to forgive. Perhaps her father wasn't a Christian. She had never really found out.

"The fact is," said Richard Halliday, who was once a second-lieutenant in the 56th London division, "I'm rather fed up with the New Rich and the comfortably respectable, and the Rolls-Royce sort of crowd who get into a spiritual stupor once a week at St. Jude's. I want to get among publicans and sinners. Or rather, I want to get honest with

myself. If there's any truth in Christianity—and I fancy there is!—it seems to me that the clergy ought to live more like Christ instead of eating buns in Belgravia, and chattering amiably to pretty ladies in expensive frocks."

"Aren't you rather hard on the pretty ladies?" asked Margaret. "I mean, don't we want the truth as well as poorer people? Perhaps a little more. . . . I do for one!"

He seemed staggered for a moment by that remark, and could find no answer to it for a second.

"They don't take anything seriously," he argued. "Most of them are completely pagan. . . . Besides, I want to save my own soul. It's egotism really, I expect. I have an idea that I shall feel more honest in the slums."

"Father thinks you're a Bolshevik," said Margaret, smiling at him again.

"I haven't any blood-lust," he said, smiling for a moment. "But this society of ours can't be right—this frightful inequality of wealth. I don't see where Christ comes in. Anyhow, I can't feel right with myself in drawing-rooms like this. I didn't become a parson for tea-cakes and tennis. I'll be damned if I did."

He spoke the last words in a kind of quiet violence and then said, "Sorry!"

"That's all right," said Margaret, pleasantly. "May I come and see you in the slums, one day? I'd like to know if you get any nearer to God down there?"

"Seriously?" he said, looking at her searchingly, but doubtfully.

"I want to know," she said. "Hesketh—my husband—doesn't believe much in God. Hardly at all, I should say. I'm rather worried, in a way. Not quite certain of things."

"Oh, Lord!" said Richard Halliday. "To me life without belief in God would be worse than death. Sometimes I *don't* believe—when I think of all the misery in the world—and then I wish to God—I mean I wish to goodness or whatever it is!—that I had met a bit of steel in the trenches. But one

must believe. If the world doesn't believe it's going to hell."

"I find people very gloomy nowadays about the poor old world," said Margaret.

And then she laughed and sprang up and called out "Guy!"

It was her brother who had sloped into the drawing-room, with his hands in the pockets of his grey flannel "bags" and his dark hair falling over his forehead, and a somewhat sulky smile about his lips and eyes when he saw a room full of chattering females, as he privately called his mother's lady friends.

"Hullo," he said, lighting up when he saw Margaret. "How's marriage? And that elderly scientist of yours?"

He allowed her to kiss him, but was glad to escape from her clutches.

"How's Art?" she said, "and those Slade girls, and your new car, and—everything? Oh, Guy, I want to talk to you tremendously. It seems a thousand years since I last saw you."

"Seven weeks," he said.

Then he glanced round the room, and raised his eyebrows. Lady Barbara Errington was expatiating on the honesty, the simplicity, the strength of dear Mr. Baldwin who was saving England from the Communists.

"Better come upstairs," said Guy. "One can't hear oneself speak down here with all this yapping."

They slipped away as the Bishop of Belgravia came in with his little old sister who ruled him with a rod of iron.

Margaret said a friendly farewell to the Rev. Richard Halliday, who was going to look for God somewhere down the Fulham Road.

XXIV

UPSTAIRS in Guy's room she had a wonderfully good hour, although for the first five minutes of it this brother and sister were not quite easy and natural with each other. At least Guy seemed to feel a grudge against her because she had married an elderly blighter (that was his way of putting it) and had left him in the lurch.

"Can't think why you did it!" he said, fumbling for a cigarette in the silver box on his table.

Margaret laughed and put her hand on his shoulder.

"Nor can I! . . . These things just happen. . . . One day you'll be caught in the same way, Guy. One of those Slade girls—some attractive creature who'll make a grab at you—or a sudden lurch on the left-hand side of your ribs—"

"Not for me!" he said, grinning slightly. "I'm immune. Marriage? Oh, Lord! Fancy talking to the same female all your life! It's bad enough to keep the conversation going for an hour. Besides, I don't like the types I meet about, chattering art, without knowing anything about it, and talking Sitwell stuff and Aldous Huxley—in a way that makes one rather sick. Verbal immorality, I call it. I'm a mediævalist."

"As far back as that, Guy?" she asked mirthfully.

"Not later than early Victorian," he said half-seriously. "I like 'em shy, afraid of a mouse, romantic, unathletic, and slightly consumptive."

"Guy, what rubbish you talk!"

"I mean it," he insisted. "There's no idealism about love, nowadays. Too much cigarette and lip-stick stuff, and this disgusting camaraderie between the sexes. Give me a little mystery and illusion. It's impossible to write a sonnet to a

girl who discusses birth control or the nationalisation of mines."

"I'm afraid you won't like Viola," said Margaret, laughing again. "She's very biological."

"How frightful!" said Guy.

"I live in an atmosphere of science," she told him. "Chromosomes—internal secretions—alpha-rays—hormones—vitamins—protons—"

"Never heard of them," said Guy. "Good Lord! . . . Very trying, I should say. How do you keep your end up?"

"I don't," she confessed, with laughing eyes. "But they're all very kind to me. I've a very nice husband, Guy. You'll like him. Only I wish sometimes he didn't have to operate on poor little monkeys, and I'm rather sorry he doesn't believe in our kind of God. . . . Guy, do you believe in God?"

He seemed rather doubtful about it.

"More or less," he said. "There must be something, somewhere, mustn't there?"

"Yes, but that's rather vague," said Margaret. "I mean, do you believe in Christianity and the Church of England, and divine revelation? Hesketh thinks that's all nonsense."

"I can't say I bother very much," said Guy after a moment's thoughtfulness. "Of course, being a clergyman's son puts one off rather! Impossible to believe in any church where one's own father gets into the pulpit and continues his breakfast-table conversation. Especially when he avoids the real issues and humbugs his congregation all the time. But does it matter very much?"

"I used to think it mattered," said Margaret. "I still think so in a way though I'm married to a scientist, who is undermining my simple faith!"

"Oh, Science!" exclaimed Guy with profound scorn. "Science leaves out all the real values, doesn't it? Personally, I find art rather satisfying. It's the only interpretation of life that I can make any sense of. The effect of light on mass—Atmosphere—Line—Construction—Rhythm. . . .

Rhythm is probably the key to the whole thing. It's what life means, really, I dare say, although I don't profess to know a thing about it, and just potter on. Have a look at some of my sketches."

She had a look at them and thought them wonderful, especially his wash-drawings of châteaux on the Loire.

"You're an idealist, Guy," she said. "You live for beauty. One day I'm afraid you'll get hurt."

"Meaning that life's an ugly business?" he asked, looking round at her with amusement.

"For sensitive souls," she said. "Have you been writing any more verses, Guy?"

"Rubbishy stuff," he told her, self-consciously. "I've been trying a few experiments in atmosphere. Trying to get the character of places—the spirit behind the stones, so to speak. Rather amusing! You might read that one on Avignon."

It was good to be in her brother's room again, with a set of etchings by Muirhead Bone on the walls, and a chalk drawing Guy had made of her—rather too long on the nose, she thought—before she had gone up to Oxford, and a pair of foils over the mantelpiece (he was keen on fencing), and his collection of books on art and history and French poetry. She felt more at home here somehow than in her husband's house at Wimbledon, much as she loved her middle-aged Hesketh. "Guy," she cried suddenly, "I feel home-sick! I'm called back to Belgravia, and mother's afternoon teas and this room of yours. Isn't that absurd—for a newly married wife? Home-sick!"

"Preposterous!" he said, jeering at her with brotherly candour.

"I shirk going back to those bare boards in Wimbledon," she confessed, laughing at her own absurdity. "Science upstairs, downstairs, and in my lady's chamber. Sick monkeys in the back garden! It's so chilly. And rather frightening."

"Extremely disagreeable," agreed Guy. "But you've made your bed, old girl—"

"I want to be cosy again," said Margaret. "In my mind, I mean. Back to Belgravia, and the cushioned pews of St. Jude's, and the spiritual security of my innocent girlhood! 'God is love' over my little white bed."

She spoke jestingly, flippantly, with laughter in her eyes, but also with a little break in her voice.

"Oh, Lord!" said Guy, "you'll never get back as far as that. *Pas possible, mon choux.* The whole blinking world can't get back to that kind of thing."

She agreed. She would never get back. She would have to look at life by the cold light of reason. And, anyhow, she was only joking. But she would be very glad if Guy would come and see her sometimes—often—every week at least.

"Promise, Guy!" she pleaded. "It's only twenty minutes to Wimbledon."

"Yes, but a world away from my harmless little hobbies," he grumbled teasingly. "I shan't know how to talk to that scientific husband of yours. I abhor the very name of Science. It means nothing to me except wireless, television and other abominations which prevent people from thinking, and convey a lot of nonsense very rapidly from one end of the world to the other."

"Hesketh can talk about other things besides science," exclaimed Margaret, loyally. "He knows quite a lot about the Italian primitives, and Greek sculpture and Egyptian civilisation. And he's just like a boy really, full of fun, and perfectly simple."

Guy was rather gloomy at that description of his sister's husband. It seemed to fulfil his worst suspicions.

"Yes, I know those old-young professors. They keep up the undergraduate pose, so broad-minded about 'flaming youth,' whatever that may be. So damned jolly!"

"Oh, that's unkind of you, Guy! Hesketh is a dear, and without any kind of pose."

She gave him a little punch and then grabbed his arm.

"You must come and cheer me up sometimes when I'm feeling home-sick for you."

"As for that girl, Viola," said Guy, brutally, "she fills me with alarm and horror from everything you tell me."

"Come and see her," laughed Margaret. "She's rather a beauty. And desperately amusing."

"Well—" said Guy.

He agreed, without enthusiasm, to have a look at his sister's menagerie.

XXV

THERE was a little preliminary conversation at the breakfast-table when Margaret announced that Guy was coming to tea, which caused her some anxiety lest there should be strained relations between her brother and her new family.

It was Viola who started it by asking whether Guy was interested at all in Behaviourism, which she thought might lead to a new form of art free from the sentimentality of old-fashioned schools. He might, she said, "illuminate the unverbalised."

"I don't think he knows what Behaviourism means," said Margaret, smiling across the coffee-pot at Viola, who was eating an immoderate quantity of marmalade, while she sat in her dressing-gown and pyjamas without having bothered to put on her stockings. "He's not interested in science, you know."

There was an ominous silence for a moment. Hesketh looked over his copy of *The Times* and smiled inscrutably. It was Cyril who expressed the family point of view. He had come down late as usual, having been taking his morning dose of ultra-violet rays from a quartz lamp which he said enabled him to resist the damned darkness of a country without sun.

"Mentally blind, in other words," he remarked with a very severe sarcasm.

"Exactly!" said Viola. "And please pass the ergosterol, Cyril. I feel deficient this morning in Vitamin D."

That was a jest of hers, and what she really meant was the butter, as she indicated with the point of her knife, having very bad table manners.

"He's a very nice brother," said Margaret. "And extremely intellectual."

"Living in a world of romantic illusion, I'm afraid, from what you've told us about him," said Viola, reaching across for the toast. "I dare say he thinks that women's place is in the home and that a beautiful maiden—like me—has been created by God to pander to the emotional sensibilities—in other words, the nerve ganglia of the solar plexus—of the male animal."

"He likes the old-fashioned types of womanhood," said Margaret, with a secret smile. She was learning to understand Viola's sense of humour, and not to take her too seriously.

"Gosh! He's born to be celibate," said Viola. "Pass the glucose, Cyril."

It was a warning that Guy might have a hostile reception in this house of science. And yet, after a slight conversational reserve at first, his visit passed off fairly well. Hesketh was charming to him and kept off science, luring him into a discussion on Italian art and surprising Guy by his knowledge and admiration of Leonardo da Vinci.

"There's a wonderful collection of his drawings in the library of Windsor Castle," he said. "Five hundred out of the nine hundred that exist anywhere. You ought to see them. They're a revelation of the industry of genius."

Even Margaret was surprised by this knowledge of Hesketh's.

"How on earth did you know that?" she asked, laughingly.

"There's hardly anything father doesn't know," said Viola with filial devotion. But a slight flutter of her right eyelid as she met Guy's glance discounted this confession of faith.

Hesketh smiled with a simple pleasure in having scored a good point.

"The Dean of Windsor's nephew happens to be one of my students. He took me down to the library one day and

showed me all the treasures. A marvellous collection of French prints."

"I'd like to see them enormously," said Guy.

"Nothing simpler," remarked Hesketh. "I'll arrange it with that young man."

"It's extraordinarily kind of you," said Guy with real gratitude.

"Delighted!" said Hesketh.

Well, that was a link formed between the Jerningham family and Margaret's brother. She had a little inner glow of pleasure. Art for the moment had triumphed over science and she was pleased also, because later in the afternoon Cyril and Viola and dear old Hesketh were quite interested in Guy's ideas on rhythm which somehow had come up in conversation.

He made some rapid drawings to explain his ideas of harmony and construction in nature, while Viola squatted beside him with her chin on her clasped hands.

"You see," said Guy, "there's a kind of rhythm and balance in things. It's the same in poetry and music, as far as I can make out. There must be a definite beat and order and pattern, if you understand what I mean. There's nothing disorderly or hugger-mugger in art. Nor in life, if it's lived properly, I suppose, although I don't know anything about it, of course."

"The lad is modest!" said Viola. "And at the same time profound. I see unexpected glimpses—"

Hesketh was rather impressed.

"You're talking in terms of science," he said. "Every scientific law is an interpretation of order. The whole object of science is to remove the disharmonies of the mind and body and to harmonise the relation of life to the universe by establishing a perfect rhythm. My job at the moment is to discover the rhythm of the internal secretions, their interactions and relative powers."

"Oh, Lord!" said Guy rather dismally. "If I thought it had anything to do with science—"

He glanced anxiously at Margaret as though imploring immediate rescue.

"Let's go and have a look round the garden before it gets dark," she suggested. "Guy might like to see the monkeys and rabbits."

"No, they're not in his line," said Viola decidedly. "Let's go for a walk on the Common and study the beauties of nature in undefiled spots—where the tripper does not strew his paper bags nor nursemaids leave their squalling brats. There are some rather good atmospheric effects at this time of the afternoon. Glamorous dusk, and all that!"

She was having some little amusement of her own, but really behaving quite well to Margaret's brother.

"How absurd it is!" thought Margaret. "Guy is not much older than this stepdaughter of mine, and Cyril might be his brother. And I feel younger than any of them, because I'm so stupid and they're all so clever. Why didn't father and mother bequeath me some of their brains? It makes me doubt Hesketh's ideas about heredity."

Guy stayed to supper and was introduced to Hesketh's father, who was very courteous to him and took him away for half an hour afterwards to see the "toys"—those mysterious machines—until he was rescued, looking rather bewildered and unhappy, by Viola, who regarded him as a sensitive plant likely to wilt under any unaccustomed strain.

"Like a mediæval knight, *sans peur et sans reproche,* but not very fond of dragons," she told Margaret privately. "Or perhaps more like one of Fra Angelico's young monks wrapt in adoration of the Virgin Mother. I feel sorry for him in this world of scientific progress from which his æsthetic soul revolts. . . . Well, we can't alter the world for him, or stop the evolution of human intelligence. But we might have a dance and see what he *really* knows about rhythm!"

They had a dance to the music of a gramophone to which Cyril had fixed an electrical attachment which did all the winding. Hesketh fox-trotted in his Oxford style with Margaret, and enjoyed himself, and forgot biology. Viola danced with Guy in her own style, which was pagan, and Greek, and terribly abandoned. Margaret watched her over Hesketh's shoulder and saw Guy's look of alarm amounting almost to consternation at times, but mingled with amusement and admiration. Viola had changed before supper into an evening frock, which was as much like the garment worn by Atalanta in her race as anything that could be made by a respectable milliner in Wimbledon. It left her arms bare and there was not very much underneath it, and it gave free play to her body and grace. She had stuck a poppy in her hair and was a Bacchante dancing with Adonis, who was timid.

"How's that for rhythm?" she asked as she flitted past Margaret.

"A revelation!" he told her, with a nervous laugh.

She flung her head back with its tawny hair and sang the negro melody of the gramophone.

"She's frightening Guy to death," Margaret confided to her husband. "Girl's don't dance like that in Belgravia. I'm not sure about Chelsea."

"He doesn't seem terrified," said Hesketh. "And I like that brother of yours, very much. A fine type. Delicate and highly strung but well poised, I should say. He has interesting ideas about art, too. Where's Cyril, by the by?"

Cyril had sloped off with his grandfather to develop some photographs of alpha-rays.

"Rather a criticism of my frivolity," said Hesketh when Margaret told him this. "Cyril is a more conscientious scientist than I am."

"Oh, bother science, to-night!" said Margaret.

"Certainly," agreed Hesketh. "Bother the whole order of nature. Let's have another fox-trot. I hate those Blues."

Guy went back by electric train, and Margaret exchanged a few words with him in the hall while he put on his overcoat.

"Not bored, Guy?"

"Good Lord, no. Quite amusing!"

"What do you think of Viola?"

"Terrifying," he said. "She made me dance like a satyr. I'm developing goat's feet."

"And Hesketh?"

She awaited his verdict anxiously.

"Not too repulsive," said Guy, grinning at her. "When shall I come again?"

He dropped over once a week generally, and sometimes twice, to Margaret's great delight.

XXVI

DURING her first six months of marriage there were times when Margaret felt lonely and isolated in this house of science. They were all so busy, these dear people who had adopted her. After Hesketh had had breakfast and his first pipe and visited his animals, he retired to his laboratory and appeared only for lunch, when he was often absurdly absent-minded (totally unconscious of what he was eating!) as though pondering over some problem of biological importance. Viola was acting as her father's laboratory assistant, and Margaret was just a little jealous of her for filling this position. Once Margaret had offered to help Hesketh in that way, but he had laughed and pinched her ear.

"Not in your line, quite, sweetheart! You're much too beautiful to get grubby in my chamber of horrors. I didn't marry you to make a drudge of you."

A terrible snub to her intelligence, she thought, though meant in perfect kindness, as Hesketh always meant to be kind. So she found herself shut out of her husband's laboratory and thrown back upon herself, unless Betty Winter came over (Margaret was always grateful to her for loyal friendship on that night before the wedding) or other girls from her former life. But Wimbledon though so close to London was outside its social circle. To get anybody down meant a special invitation, and even Guy shirked the journey when he was working at the Slade School, unless he made an evening of it.

Cyril, with whom she was becoming very comradely—she could talk more seriously to him than she could to Viola—was not available, any more than Hesketh, until the evening. He

was either away at King's College, or helping his grandfather with his radio-photography, or studying in his own room. So the house was quiet and the hall clock ticked very slowly sometimes, as far as she was concerned in time-space. More than once she stood outside the drawing-room where she had been reading a novel, or trying to get a little science into her head by studying one of Hesketh's textbooks, and wondered if there were any chance of human companionship. But there was dead silence all through the house, except sometimes the faint whirring of some electrical machine upstairs, or, from the open windows, the shrill sharp cry of some sick monkey in the garden. . . .

Mrs. Squeede, the housekeeper, was always ready to oblige in the way of conversation, and was a nice old dear who had nursed Hesketh as well as Cyril and Viola, and told remarkable stories about the boyhood of a scientist which would have been invaluable to his future biographers. "The master," as she now called him, had been a very naughty little boy sometimes. Once he had thrown a soap dish at her when she had tried to bath him, and she still bore the mark of the cut upon her face. She had walloped him soundly. It was not every cook-housekeeper who could boast of spanking her own master! Mr. Cyril had inherited his father's character—very passionate when roused. He had bitten her thumb once when she was cleaning out his ears. As for Miss Viola, she was a bundle of naughtiness from the very beginning and not much better now. She'd be a rare handful to any husband who tried to tame her. . . . And so on, for an hour at a time, which was very amusing until she began to tell the same stories again, with an endless delight of repetition. "Did I ever tell you, dearie—" It was the soap-dish story again, from which Margaret revolted when she had heard it for the eighth time. "Squeaky," as they called her, was becoming one of her trials. . . .

Then Hesketh became anxious about the health of his father, which cast a gloom over the family. His appetite was

poor and he did not sleep well, and his sight, which had been so keen, showed signs of the *arcus senilis* so that his research work was becoming a trouble to him.

"He's worrying about himself," said Hesketh. "I'm afraid he's breaking up. It seems a damnable thing that old age should come creeping on before one's life-work is accomplished. Unfair to humanity!"

He was very thoughtful over his father's ill-health as though wondering whether he could thrust back this tragedy of inevitable decay.

Margaret knew the cause of Mr. Jerningham's worry. It was that fear of death which he had confessed to her so pitifully one day. He felt the touch of that cold hand already, as she knew by hints which he let drop now and then. Once, for instance, when she sat in his room again he told her suddenly that he was going to leave her a little money, so that when he was gone she might buy herself some pretty things, now and then, without having to ask Hesketh for every penny she spent.

Sometimes she took him for a walk on Wimbledon Common in mild autumn weather and noticed that he leaned more heavily on her arm than he used to do, and that his hands were thinner and more parchment-like. It was on one of those walks or rather when they were seated together on a wooden bench on the edge of the Common where he leaned forward with his hands clasped on his stick, that he broke a long spell of silence by a tragic foreboding.

"I shan't see another Spring, my dear."

Margaret was startled and sorry.

"Oh, don't say that!" she protested. "There's no reason—"

He laughed sadly, staring across the Common, as though he saw some one coming.

"The old man with the scythe!" he said. "One can't dodge him at my age. Threescore years and ten. That's the limit."

"Not nowadays," said Margaret.

He did not seem to hear her.

"I shall have to go without finding the answer to the riddle. Atomic energy, and all that! Well, some other fellow will make use of my experiments. I hope it's young Cyril. He's a Jerningham."

Margaret tried to cheer him up, but she noticed presently that tears were falling down his cheeks.

"Death!" he said. "Most unpleasant!"

She reported a little of that conversation to Hesketh, and made him miserable.

"Poor old governor!" he said. "It's hellish!"

"If he believed in a future life," said Margaret, but she did not finish her sentence because she had given up arguing with Hesketh on that subject.

There had been an exchange of dinner-parties between Hesketh and Margaret and her father and mother—not very successful. Hesketh had been patient and good-natured, although showing signs of restiveness and boredom, until Margaret's bird-like little mother had expounded her faith in the British Israelites and the Second Phase of Tribulation, rapidly approaching according to the Pyramid prophecies. On the way home in the electric train that night, Hesketh—exhibiting a much crumpled shirt front and with his dress tie so disorderly that Margaret had to tidy him up in the railway carriage—broke out into a bitter denunciation of her mother's gift of intellectual torture.

"For five hours I had to listen to that preposterous nonsense!" he protested. "Not even for love of you, my dear, could I endure it again. . . . And what I find most depressing is the thought that a highly educated woman like that little mother of yours could believe all that stuff and nonsense. The Eternal Gullible! It makes me doubt my own faith in the possibility of raising the standard of human reason."

Margaret had laughed at him.

"If you lose your faith in the Age of Reason, Hesketh,

you'll be a lost soul. Without Religion and without Reason there'll be no hope at all, will there?"

"None whatever!" he admitted. "But fortunately your mother is not a normal type. She ought to be seen to. I dare say she didn't get rid of her thymus at puberty."

Margaret slapped his hand, to the amusement of a young man opposite.

"Mother is eccentric, but she brought me into the world and you ought to be grateful."

"That's true!" said Hesketh, staggered by the thought. "It shows the extreme difficulty of that science of Eugenics in which I'm trying to discover a kind of law. There's still a lot to be done before we can dogmatise. Infinite variations in the scale of chromosomes."

"Hush!" said Margaret. "Not at this time of night, Hesketh."

The worst of it was that this scientific husband of hers had not hit it off with her father. She was sorry about that, because she had hoped that her father's acceptance and knowledge of science, his broad-minded views about religion, would appeal to Hesketh. But somehow or other he was enraged intellectually by this attempt to build a bridge between science and revelation.

"There's no such compromise possible," he declared that night in their bedroom. "Your father hedges all the time. He's a Mr. Facing Both Ways. If he accepts the conclusions of science he can't talk highfalutin stuff about supernatural faculties, and the divine mission of the Anglican Church. He can't believe in the Fall and divine redemption if he accepts the gradual development of man from lower forms and his ascent from his Neanderthal ancestor."

"It might have happened later," suggested Margaret wistfully.

But Hesketh shook his head.

"He's intellectually dishonest, I'm afraid, and trying to make the best of both worlds—Science and Faith."

"But, Hesketh," said Margaret, who was doing her hair before that very small mirror in her barely furnished bedroom, "don't you really believe in the soul?"

"Not in a supernatural and immortal soul," said Hesketh, unlacing his evening shoes as he sat on the side of his bed. "Mind is another thing. I think that according to perfectly natural laws it's capable of tremendous powers which may be indefinitely developed. There's hardly a limit even now to the influence of the mind over the body, although of course the mind is subject to the body, especially when it's diseased or abnormal. The fact is the mind *is* the body. Alter one and you alter the other. Control one and you control the other. Biology—"

He took off his collar and dropped it on to the floor where his evening dress tie already lay.

"I'm sorry you don't like father," said Margaret, rather miserably. "And I'm sorry you don't believe in the soul. Without a soul nothing seems worth while, in a way. Life seems so meaningless."

"Oh, Lord, yes," said Hesketh. "It's a great adventure. I get a lot of fun out of it!"

Margaret had finished doing her hair. She came close to her husband and put her bare arms about his shoulders.

"I wish I could share the fun with you just a little more," she said. "I'm really a stranger in your house of science, outside the room, Hesketh."

"Inside my heart," he said and held her tight.

XXVII

SHE did not mention this sense of loneliness to Betty Winter, who made whirlwind appearances now and then, having come down from Oxford owing to the sudden death of her father and a consequent plunge into poverty. Her mother had taken a small flat in the genteel wilderness of West Kensington, and Betty was looking for a job which might help to keep the family pot boiling (she had two small sisters with big appetites) and provide her at the same time with experience of life, satisfying to her intellectual curiosity.

"I don't want to be buried alive in a hat shop or a city office," she explained to Margaret on her first visit. "What's the good of having been to Oxford and assimilated a lot of knowledge, besides acquiring expensive tastes, unless I can develop my remarkable personality?"

"What's your ambition exactly?" asked Margaret in answer to this challenging question. "There's nothing you couldn't do, Betty, if you really set your mind to it."

Betty acknowledged this compliment (perfectly sincere on Margaret's part) by one of those fantastic speeches which used to shock Margaret so much before she was a married woman in a scientific and free-spoken family.

"I yearn for Power," she said. "I want to control the destiny of nations. I want to become a female Mussolini, creating a new social order on strictly biological principles. Failing that I wouldn't mind being a movie star earning three hundred a week and bathing in champagne and marble baths before innumerable photographers."

"Betty!" cried Margaret, scandalised by such an outrageous idea.

Betty Winter allowed herself a little laughter.

"Meanwhile," she said, "I'm learning typewriting and reading the advertisements for lady secretaries in the *Daily Telegraph*. I must earn four pounds a week or my family will perish. . . . Tell me, sweet Margaret, how do you like marriage to a middle-aged professor?"

"I'm perfectly happy," said Margaret. "Hesketh is wonderfully good and kind."

For some reason Betty seemed to doubt her perfect happiness.

"Sure?" she asked inquisitively. "You look a little sad now and then when you're off your guard. You've lost that childlike gaiety and simple innocence which used to make me want to mother you up at Oxford. What's your worry, Mrs. Hesketh Jerningham?"

"None whatever," said Margaret, loyally. She hid the reasons for those moods of melancholy which touched her spirit now and then—reasons hardly known to herself, really, but due perhaps to her ignorance of science, and too much time on her hands, and—how silly that would sound to Betty Winter!—a sense of something missing now that Hesketh had shaken her simple faith.

"Going to have a baby?" asked Betty.

Margaret shook her head.

"No such luck, I'm afraid."

"That's a pity," said Betty. "I must say I wouldn't mind having a baby myself, if I could manage it without a husband, but honestly, I couldn't bring myself to the idea of living with the same man year in year out. It would be so hard on him for one thing. I'm tempestuous when I'm roused—and so easily roused!"

Margaret was silent for a few moments sitting in her barely furnished and rather chilly drawing-room in Wimbledon, with this friend of hers, just as in the Oxford days they had sat talking for hours together. It was splendid to have her again, looking more lovely than ever with her Rossetti-

like face and red hair and roguish eyes. But she wished she wouldn't be so flippant and non-moral. It was rather like the way Viola talked, and she was getting a little worried about all this free speech.

"Betty," she said, "do you mean these things you say, or is it just your sense of humour? It's rather awful, isn't it, if we give up all respect for marriage and law and—decency? I've given up religion—Hesketh doesn't believe in it, but I don't want to give up morality."

Betty looked staggered by that speech, perhaps a little conscience stricken. She took Margaret's hand and held it tight.

"You're still an Early Victorian, dear. I ought not to shock you so much. You mustn't take me seriously, my dear. The truth is that we modernists—you're not one of us, Margaret!—are trying to grope our way to some philosophy of life which will put us in harmony with this bewildering world about us. And we can't find the clue."

"I'm afraid I'm in the same boat," said Margaret.

"You see, my dear," said Betty, "we've broken with the old traditions—older folk say they were smashed in the war—but I think they were wearing thin before that—and religion doesn't count nowadays, unless one happens to be a Papist like Camilla Jessop, or a little goody-goody in love with the local curate, and not worried by Dean Inge or your iconoclastic father."

"Poor father!" exclaimed Margaret. "He tries so hard to be honest!"

"Think of all the thousands of women like me," said Betty, continuing her apologia, "millions of us, having to face life on our own—bachelor girls—not very keen on marriage because so often it means squalor and loss of independence—and in a terrible majority anyhow over the male creature who isn't being born enough to go round and is pretty feeble when he's born. What are we going to do about it? And how are we going to answer all those problems that thrust themselves into our faces every time we sit in a tramcar and open a

newspaper, or read a novel. Most disturbing! Creatures like me—of course I'm exceptional, thank God—take refuge in flippancy. I grin, and say audacious things. That's my way of masking a sense of uneasiness. Sometimes I have a feeling of tragic futility, Margaret! Only for goodness' sake don't let anybody know! It's a secret I'm very careful about."

This particular conversation was interrupted by Cyril who sloped down into the drawing-room and asked if any tea were going, and looked shyly and suspiciously at Betty Winter. He was always on his guard when any of Margaret's girl friends happened to drift in, especially if they were beautiful like Betty. It was as though he were afraid of being tempted by that "sex-stuff" of which he and Viola spoke so contemptuously.

Betty came again quite often, until she found a job as the paid secretary of a hospital for children off the Fulham Road, and after that Margaret missed her visits and felt lonely again, although sometimes Betty had an afternoon "off" when they went to matinées together, or met in some tea-shop in the neighbourhood of Piccadilly.

XXVIII

IT was at a matinée of *The Constant Nymph,* with Betty and Viola and her brother Guy, that she met Audley Instone again, after his Italian studies. It was Viola who spotted him, with her quick roving eyes.

"There's that beautiful man we met in Santa Maria della Salute," she said during the first interval. "Looking perfectly marvellous in a tail coat and striped trousers."

"It's Audley Instone," said Guy. "I thought he was still in Rome."

They caught his glance and he raised a friendly hand and smiled over at their group. He was sitting with a girl who had used lip-stick rather heavily but was otherwise good-looking, and during the second interval he abandoned her for a few minutes and came over to their part of the stalls. It was Margaret that he greeted first.

"I expected a card from you at the F.O.," he said, meaning the Foreign Office, as he explained with a smile at Viola, who questioned the meaning of those mystic letters.

"Aren't you too superior to come out to Wimbledon?" Margaret asked, defending herself by attacking. "I hesitated to give you our suburban address!"

"Good heavens!" he said. "I'm just the office boy of an under-secretary's secretary! Learning to decipher codes in a neat hand."

Viola remarked that he looked like a very distinguished diplomat, and he bowed gracefully in acknowledgment of this compliment. Then he turned to Guy and said, "How's Art?"

Guy was of opinion that Art was pretty much the same as usual, which was mostly damned bad.

"Where are you living these days?" he asked.

Audley Instone revealed under pressure that he was living in Park Lane. It wasn't his fault that his people were hopeless Philistines.

"Impossible to ask you out to Wimbledon!" laughed Margaret teasingly.

"Try me," he suggested, and she invited him to tea on the following Sunday.

"Charmed!" he assured her, and went back to the lady of the lip-stick.

Guy made a surprising and unfriendly comment when he was out of ear-shot.

"Audley hasn't improved since I last saw him. Too much side and too well dressed. I expect it's the Foreign Office influence."

"Sour grapes!" said Viola in her school-girl manner.

"No," said Guy, "sweet champagne, I should say, judging from the painted lady."

Margaret could not quite follow that association of ideas. But she glanced at Guy with a smiling surprise. He and Audley Instone had been very friendly when they were at Harrow together. It was unlike him to be so critical. She wondered if Viola's admiring glance at Audley was the cause of this comment. Lately she had suspected that Guy was becoming rather attracted by Viola and her wood-nymph ways, although he still called her "alarming" and "untamed." However alarming she might be—and certainly she was—he had overcome his fear to the extent of taking her to a dance one afternoon and had invited her to come and see his drawings. He had also driven her down to Winchester one day, where they had had tea together at the Godbegot and come home to Wimbledon rather late. Margaret had felt a little hurt about that, although of course as a married woman it was her duty and desire to stay with Hesketh. Still, Guy might have given her the chance of joining them. She

would be jealous of anybody who took him away from her even for a day when there was a chance of a quiet hour with him.

As for Audley, she declined to agree that he had any kind of "side." He had the exquisite manners that belong by tradition to Harrow and the House, not unlike Guy's own style. And she was delighted that he wanted to come and see her in Wimbledon, in spite of her "damned biologist." She remembered with a little sentiment those passionate words which Audley had spoken in an Oxford tea-shop one day. They hadn't meant very much. Audley had not broken his heart about her! But she was glad to see him again, and to know that he still liked her, as she could see by his eyes, and by her woman's instinct. It would be nice to have him for a friend. Perhaps if she became very lonely sometimes at Wimbledon, when all the others were busy in their usual way, he might take her to the theatre now and then, or "do" a dance with her in town. Hesketh wouldn't mind, as he had told her several times.

"Don't you ever think," he said, "that I want to keep you like a squaw—like too many poor wives even nowadays. Go and enjoy yourself with any young friends if you're bored at all in this old house."

He had gone further than that, shocking her somewhat, and even hurting her.

"And if ever you get tired of a middle-aged husband, or fall in love with some young fellow more suitable to your own age and beauty, just you hop off, sweetheart, and consider yourself as free as air. I'll hate to see you go, because I'm your devout lover now and always, but I don't believe in married chains. That's Old-Man-in-the-Cave stuff, as H. G. would say. I'm more civilised than that!"

"How absurd you are, Hesketh!" she had said, laughing at him and rumpling his hair. "You and your silly Free Love! It's a horrible idea, and utterly non-moral!"

She had kissed him as a proof that he would never get rid of her like that . . . She only remembered his words as an assurance that if she wanted to make a friend of Audley Instone or anyone else, Hesketh wouldn't worry.

XXIX

HESKETH did not worry when, after that tea at Wimbledon, Audley invited her to dine with him at the Green Park and do a dance afterwards at a club in Soho. He included Viola in the invitation, with a smiling afterthought as Margaret noticed, much to her delight, and suggested that Guy should come along to be her dancing partner. But Cyril wasn't keen on dancing, and decided to be odd man out when Audley glanced at him and said, "Delighted if you'd come along too."

"Not in my line," he said, "thanks very much," and Margaret noticed that he was a shade grumpy, just as Guy had been when they had met Audley in the stalls. Perhaps it was because Audley was rather dazzling in his good looks (Cyril suggested privately that he would make a very good movie merchant) and too conventional in his manners. He was certainly richly endowed with the good things of life and had turned up magnificently in a Rolls-Royce two-seater, to the admiration of some errand boys who gathered round the front gate to stare at it. A week later, when he came to collect them for that dinner-party, he drove up in a full-size Daimler, complete with chauffeur, and explained that he had borrowed one of his people's cars as there was not room for three in his own runabout.

"How many cars do your people keep?" asked Viola in her candid way. "They're not garage proprietors by any chance, are they?"

"Not so respectable as that," he answered, flushing slightly as though he had been accused of "bucking." "My father made his money out of a nation's thirst. Instone's Pale Ale. Never drink any, because it's poor stuff, I'm told. A fraud on the public, really."

He laughed quietly after this escape from snobbishness.

"You must be beastly rich," said Viola. "How do you propose to stifle your conscience in these days of democratic idealism?"

"Oh, Lord," he said, "need I? I'm afraid my conscience isn't very acute. I'm a Hedonist, without serious convictions."

Viola reached out for a dictionary which was handy on a shelf, as they were in the room which Hesketh called his study, though it was often their play-room.

"That's one up on me!" she exclaimed. "Hedonist. . . . Hedge sparrow . . . hedge writer . . . hedonism. . . . The doctrine that pleasure or happiness is the chief end of man. . . . Well, that sounds very reasonable. And the chief end of woman, as far as I'm concerned, dear people!—But I don't quite see how Mr. Instone can wallow in happiness when so many people are wallowing in misery, without a prick of conscience at such inequality of opportunity.

She rolled out these long words with great gusto, like a lady member of Parliament, and was enjoying herself thoroughly.

"Perhaps you'd better not go to that dance," suggested Margaret teasingly. "You might get an attack of conscience and have to be carried out."

"Not likely," said Viola calmly. "Much as I believe in social equality, nothing is going to interfere with my enjoyment at the expense of other people, who can afford to pay, until Bill Cook gets busy with them."

"What bosh you do talk!" said Cyril with brotherly candour and a broad grin.

"I can't make up my mind," laughed Margaret, "whether you're a very wicked young woman or only a humorist in a frock that's much too short."

"Ah!" said Viola darkly, "I'm not telling."

Audley Instone seemed to find her wonderfully amusing. Perhaps he enjoyed the sensation of having his English and

Oxford sense of reserve shattered by Viola's alarming candour and liberty of speech. He laughed even when she did not say anything funny, as though there must be a joke which he could not quite get. But in spite of this amusement he was sometimes embarrassed during his dinner at the Green Park Hotel by Viola's abandoned behaviour. She wore her Atalanta frock—that Greek kirtle of white silk—and had twined some artificial vine leaves round her hair, so that she looked more like a nymph than was really good in a respectable hotel. She also insisted upon drinking sweet champagne which made her eyes sparkle, and raised her glass to propose the toast of Mr. Audley Instone, coupled with the philosophy of Hedonism as defined by Nuttall's Standard Dictionary.

"My dear Viola," said Margaret, "do remember what a reverberent voice you have! People are staring at you."

"I'm not too bad to look at," she answered calmly. "Am I, Guy? What's your impartial view of me, speaking as an artist? How am I for Rhythm?"

Guy looked at her quizzingly, though shyly.

"You're in the style of a Botticelli Venus," he said. "I'd like to make a sketch of you with those vine leaves in your hair."

"You shall," she promised him, "if father can spare me. With or without clothes?"

"Viola!" exclaimed Margaret, really scandalised.

"What's the matter?" asked Viola with wide-eyed surprise. "Guy is drawing from the life, isn't he? You're not shocked, are you, Guy, my little one?"

"Not in the least," he said, but a faint flush which crept into his face seemed to suggest that he was startled anyhow.

It was afterwards in the night club—a most respectable place, said Audley—when that young man expressed his opinion of Viola who was dancing with Guy in rose-coloured light to the hypnotic rhythm of saxophones and drums.

"Amazing girl! The most pagan thing I have ever met. How did she come about?"

Margaret explained her upbringing and astonished him.

"Rather dangerous, I should say," he remarked thoughtfully. "Not that I'm an Early Victorian exactly. Still, I'm bound to say some of these very modern young women are just a little alarming."

"That's what Guy thinks," said Margaret, smiling at him.

"Most of us do," said Audley. "Girls nowadays have advanced farther than the men. As I was born shy and traditional I can't keep up with them when they discuss everything in life as though it had just happened. Then they wonder why we lag behind. The fact is, fellows like me—conventionalists really—are getting rather scared. We don't know what it's going to lead to."

"No," said Margaret. "But then, you see, I'm rather Early Victorian. A clergyman's daughter!"

"I know," he said. "That's why—"

He checked the end of that sentence, but she guessed that he meant a compliment, and laughed.

"Not that I pretend to be a moralist or anything like that," he said earnestly, as though he hated the idea of suggesting that he was a superior person. "I mean, I don't want to convert the world to righteousness or anything of that sort."

"I believe you're an Idealist," said Margaret.

"Good heavens, no!" he exclaimed, really shocked at such an idea. "I'm just like millions of other fellows who want to get as much fun out of life as possible without hurting other people. Do have another cigarette, won't you?"

Margaret didn't have another cigarette. She was watching the dancers in that rose-coloured light. Some of them were Audley's type, nice-looking young men, just a little unintellectual, perhaps, according to Hesketh's standard and Cyril's, and rather bored, she thought. They were dancing with girls who might have been their own sisters or hers, mostly bobbed, some of them with nice Eton crops. They

didn't seem to be enjoying themselves very much, but they were probably used to this sort of thing. There was nothing wrong with them, she thought. Here and there were elderly men with ladies who looked a little dangerous and decadent, with painted lips and languorous eyes. But there was nothing for a moralist to rave against as a haunt of vice or anything like that. And yet perhaps there was something rather unhealthy in this overheated room with its dim rose-tinted lights and monotonous pulsation of drums beating to the wild screechings of the saxophones. There was something pagan about it.

"The facts is most of us *are* pagan," she thought, "we moderns!" and she wondered for a moment whether any of these people worried, as she did sometimes, about the meaning of life, or whether they had any kind of religion. Perhaps they were all like Audley who wanted to get as much fun out of life as possible without hurting anybody. That sounded rather charming. And yet they did hurt, and get hurt, some of them. One read of frightful tragedies every day, and none of them seemed quite happy, even here, except Viola, perhaps, who was the most pagan of them all, and was certainly enjoying herself. She wondered what Hesketh would think of a place like this. Probably he would want to get up and speak to them about the Age of Reason, and tell them that unless they hurried up their intellectual evolution they would all get smashed in another world war, or something of the sort! She had a sudden vision of Hesketh very earnestly addressing these dancers on the subject of Science and Life—with a mild earnestness of gaze through his horn-rimmed glasses. How annoyed they would be! They would probably pelt him with champagne corks or laugh to the shrill music of the saxophones.

Audley was watching her through the cigarette smoke which was like a thin fog in the room.

"Why do you smile?" he asked. "What have you been thinking about?"

"Just wandering thoughts," she answered, "and quite silly!"

Viola came dancing round with Guy. They danced together beautifully now, with a perfect rhythm that was good to watch. Music in motion. Viola was wonderfully graceful and alive in her partner's arms. And that partner was Guy, who had been so shy of girls. She saw his face as he passed and was startled at its expression. He was smiling, and bent his head down a little to whisper something to Viola. There was a curious look in his eyes, which she had never seen before. He had the look of a faun who had caught some beauty of the woods and held her tight.

"She's amazingly graceful," said Audley, looking at Viola with amusement. "In a year or two she'll be dangerously attractive, don't you think?"

For some reason Margaret was scared by the look on Guy's face. Perhaps it wouldn't be good for him to see too much of Viola. They were both so young—and he was so sensitive—and she was so untamed.

"Isn't it getting very late?" she asked.

"Oh, early yet!" said Audley.

"Hesketh will be waiting up for us," she reminded him.

Viola was a rebel at the idea of leaving so early, but Margaret coaxed her away after another dance. They were going to drive back in Audley's Daimler and Guy was to be dropped on the way.

"I hope you haven't been bored," said Audley as he stepped out of his own car at the Piccadilly end of Bond Street.

"It's a change from Wimbledon!" said Margaret. "Thanks tremendously!"

"We must do a show one night," said Audley. "Something amusing. . . . No high-brow stuff!"

"I mustn't forsake my scientist too much," said Margaret loyally. "Perhaps a matinée when he's busy working."

"Great idea!" said Audley with real enthusiasm.

She held out her hand to him and he raised it to his lips in that Italian way which he sometimes affected, rather charmingly, with a humorous smile. There was nothing wrong in this touch of his lips on her finger-tips, though Guy raised his eyebrows and said, "Is that quite English?"

"Italian," said Viola, "and quite traditional."

She too held out her hand to be kissed and Audley obliged her with a good-natured laugh.

"I don't like these indiscriminate favours," remarked Guy, rather peevishly, as the car drove off to Belgravia. "That fellow Audley is developing the manners of a lounge lizard."

It was another touch of jealousy, a portent which Margaret noticed.

"Ungrateful child!" exclaimed Viola. "Think of all the money he spent on us to-night. My conscience won't recover for a fortnight. My Communist principles were violated."

"His people swim in money," said Guy. "It's disgusting to think of."

"Horrible," said Viola. "But, oh, so pleasant."

She wanted to know when Guy proposed to make a drawing of her. The idea appealed to her vanity, she said. It would be a change from messing about in her father's laboratory.

"Isn't that rather disloyal to Science?" asked Margaret. She was absurdly anxious to prevent those sittings to Guy. They might lead to—well, complications!

"I'm greedy for life," said Viola. "Science, Art, beauty and so forth—it's all grist to my little mill."

"What about Wednesday?" asked Guy. "Any time in the afternoon."

Viola thought Wednesday would do very well.

Margaret made no verbal objection. How could she when she was not many years older than her own stepdaughter, and when there was no reason anyhow why her brother should not be friendly with this madcap? And yet she

didn't quite like it because of her love for Guy, and a touch of unreasonable anxiety.

She kissed him when he left them outside her old home. "Love to father and mother, Guy!"

For a moment she had that sense of home-sickness for her old family life which she thought so childish every time it came to her. It would be nice to creep into the house with Guy and go to that little room upstairs where she had slept as a girl, or into Guy's room for a talk on the side of his bed until he yawned and said, "Well, we seem to have settled life!" . . . Married life with a distinguished scientist—dear old Hesketh—was wonderful in a way, but rather lonely sometimes, and perhaps just a little frightening now and then. Hesketh's ideas were so different from hers, so ruthless sometimes in his desire for facts.

"Well," said Viola on the way home, "so that's what they call Gay Life! Not unamusing for once in a while, but rather dull really, and perfectly silly if you made a habit of it."

"You seemed to enjoy yourself," said Margaret. "You and Guy—"

"Oh, Guy's all right," she agreed. "Very young for his age and stuffed with false idealism, but nice to look at and very pure. I'll probably blast his young life before I've done with him."

"Please don't!" said Margaret nervously. "I wish you wouldn't say such things, Viola, even as a joke."

"I'm getting rather fond of the child," said Viola, as though that statement were a sufficient explanation of her gloomy prophecy.

She laughed mysteriously and then tucked her arm through Margaret's and snuggled close under the heavy rug which went with Audley's car.

"Audley's rather a dear too," she said. "And very much in love with you, my beautiful stepmother!"

"Viola!" cried Margaret sharply. "For goodness' sake—"

She could not prevent herself from blushing very deeply, because she remembered that scene in the tea-shop when Audley had protested against her engagement to Hesketh. But she was quite certain that he had recovered from that sentimental mood. It was kind of him to want her friendship now that she was an old married woman—six months married anyhow, and utterly different. She was inclined to be angry with Viola, although she knew all the time that this girl was only exercising her sense of humour which was beyond restraint.

"Father won't mind," said Viola reassuringly. "He's very broad-minded, and doesn't believe in the old dog-in-the-manger idea of married life."

"He believes in loyalty—as I do!" said Margaret rather hotly.

"Loyalty? What's that?" asked Viola teasingly.

Margaret smacked her hand and they had a little fight under the fur rug until Viola called "Pax!" and shortly afterwards fell asleep on Margaret's shoulder between Putney Bridge and Wimbledon.

At home Hesketh was dozing before the dining-room fire when Margaret crept in with her latchkey, feeling rather guilty and conscience-stricken for having abandoned him for so long an evening. Viola banged the front door with a noise enough to wake seven devils and came in singing one of those dance tunes they had heard.

"Had a good time?" asked Hesketh, stretching himself.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" said Viola.

Margaret knelt down by his chair and laid her cheek against her husband's.

"Haven't been too lonely?" she asked.

"Not a bit," he answered cheerfully. "I've been working out that paper for the British Ass. Glad of a quiet time for once without the family!"

"Oh, well, if you didn't miss us—" said Margaret.

She was sorry he hadn't missed her just a little, in spite of that work of his.

Cyril sloped down in his pyjamas with his hair ruffled.

"How's night life and that elegant blighter Audley Instone?" he asked with a gloomy irony.

"Both very amusing," said Viola. "And what's the matter with you, Mr. Stick-in-the-mud?"

She did not wait for his answer, but went to get some lemonade from the kitchen.

There was nothing the matter with him, it seemed, except a little astonishment, as he told Margaret, that two intelligent females should care to pass their time in an unhygienic atmosphere with a good-looking half-wit who sponged on his parents' ill-gotten wealth.

"That's very severe, Cyril," said Margaret.

His frown lifted slightly and he answered less grumpily:

"Oh, well, as long as you enjoyed yourself. I dare say this house gets on your nerves a bit. Too much science, I expect! What with father and grandfather and me and the monkeys—"

He looked at her quizzingly, with searching eyes and a smile about his lips.

"I've never said so!" said Margaret, rather warmly.

"No," he answered. "But it's easy to see."

Hesketh had been locking up and came back from the hall, yawning loudly.

"Oh, Lord! Time for bed, young people!"

XXX

MARGARET had been up to Town one day to meet Betty when she came face to face with the Reverend Richard Halliday who had been her father's curate. He was striding along Piccadilly—and coming her way—with a distant look in his eyes as though totally unaware of the people surging past him. He was pitifully shabby in clerical clothes which had worn shiny, and a clumping pair of boots which he might have worn in the trenches, and his delicate face looked haggard and tired, she thought.

Margaret touched his arm as he was about to pass her, and said, "Mr. Halliday!"

He started as though he had had an electric shock, and then took off his black hat—rather weak about the brim—and held her hand for a moment.

"I didn't see you," he said. "I'm getting fearfully absent-minded."

For a moment they stood there, smiling at each other, and during that second of time she thought, "Here is a man who believes in God!"

A queer thought in the middle of Piccadilly.

"Where can we talk?" asked Margaret.

For some reason she felt eager to talk to him. Perhaps it was because his view of life was so different from Hesketh's. He still held on somehow to the faith in which she had once believed until Hesketh had told her how silly it all was, utterly unscientific!—and until she suspected that her father didn't believe anything at all with any certainty. He had given himself away terribly that night with Hesketh,

and had gone further than Dean Inge himself in ridiculing the dogma of the Anglican Church. But Mr. Halliday, she thought, was like one of those early Christians whose faith was a kind of white flame burning all earthly desires of comfort and luxury and self-indulgence. She contrasted him with Audley Instone, so elegantly dressed, denying himself nothing which money could buy, so amused with life, so free from convictions. This ascetic man by her side, who had been through the war and deserved some happiness, surely, after all he had suffered, had deliberately sought poverty and discomfort and squalor for some ideal of service and his belief in the Christ-like life. Hesketh would call it a case of abnormal psychology, or a hark-back to belief in an anthropomorphic God with a fixed scale of rewards and punishments—the old darkness of the mediæval mind—as he always said—but she couldn't quite agree with him even now. At least she felt called back sometimes to the simplicity of her girlhood and that sentimentalised religion in which she had once found a sense of spiritual comfort now denied her.

"What about a seat in the Green Park?" he asked, looking across Piccadilly to the railings on the south side where leafless trees loomed vaguely through a damp mist.

"You haven't an overcoat," she said, glancing at his shabby black suit, worn shiny at the knees and elbows.

"Oh, I'm hardened," he told her. "I haven't worn a top coat since I was demobilised in 1920. Quite needless in a climate like this."

They crossed the road when the stream of traffic was stopped by the white arm of authority and went into the misty Park, where a nursemaid passed them with her perambulator, and a soldier walking with his girl, and an old gentleman taking a constitutional, perhaps, after a heavy lunch at the club, and a young woman who glanced at him with a smile that conveyed some message to which he shook his head.

They sat on one of the seats next to a sleeping tramp with a battered bowler hat tipped over his face.

"Do you mind this neighbour?" asked Mr. Halliday. "I'll keep on the windward side. I dare say he was trudging the streets all night, poor devil."

She didn't mind, and sat at the end of the seat with her fur coat tucked up about her neck.

"Tell me," she said. "Have you found God in Fulham? Do you remember? You said you'd let me know."

She turned and smiled at him, and saw his thin lips twist to an answering smile.

"God's there all right," he answered. "He prefers it to Belgravia, I think."

She wondered how he knew that. How did anybody know what God thought? Hesketh denied the very existence of God.

"Those slum folk are marvellous on the whole," said Richard Halliday. "Apart from occasional wife-beatings and drunkenness and filthy language which doesn't mean anything, and a fair amount of immorality among the boys and girls."

"It doesn't sound too good!" she answered, laughing at him.

"Oh, Lord, yes!" he said. "Courage and charity go a long way in dark places. They're unbelievably helpful to each other—the older folk—when there's illness or disaster. You'll find something of the spirit of Christ in dirty tenements that are a disgrace to civilisation. Women living like saints with seven kids in one room and another coming, and a drunken husband who won't bring home his wages."

"Isn't that an argument in favour of Birth Control?" asked Margaret. "That's what Hesketh always says."

For a moment he was silent, as though thinking the matter out.

"I don't agree," he said. "You can't cure evil by immorality. The only remedy is to get at the selfishness of rich

people and teach them a little Christianity. Many of these slum houses belong to rich landlords. Better control *them* than encourage race suicide as a means of improving the standard of life. More room for the rich. Less children for the poor. Only really nice people allowed to live. O Christ!"

His voice thrilled with a passionate irony, and perhaps those last words, spoken not as an oath but as a kind of prayer, stirred the dreams of that tramp who was sleeping next to them with his head sunk on his chest and his battered hat tipped over his face. He shifted his position so that his head tilted sideways with a strangled look like a turkey with its neck wrung. He snored with a long-drawn resonance that was rather horrible, thought Margaret, but Richard Halliday seemed quite unconscious of it.

"Well," said Margaret, "it's all very difficult, isn't it?"

"Impossible!" he answered with a smile. "Unless we become a Christian nation again."

She thought over the possibility of that. If Hesketh had his way the nation would abandon Christianity altogether, in favour of his Age of Reason. . . . Religion without revelation.

"I'm afraid that's unlikely," she said. "Is there any faith in Fulham?"

She spoke lightly, with a smile, but she was anxious to know.

"They're waiting for a new revelation," he answered. "A prophet would have a great time in Linnets' Grove. If Christ came, He'd be safer there than further West. There He would certainly be arrested for seditious speech. . . . Still, I can't pretend they're fond of parsons. Some of the old folk who were 'brought up pious' crawl round to church now and then. It's the young crowd I want to get at. They don't care a damn about traditional religion, and they've no more use for the Church of England than they have for the British Museum. Less! They get their moral code

from the movies, and on the whole it's not a bad one, although it doesn't help much in a crisis."

The tramp shifted again. His head turned to the other side and rested on Richard Halliday's shoulder.

"I thought you said they were waiting for revelation," said Margaret.

"They're thinking pretty hard—some of them," said Richard Halliday. "They want some answer to the riddle of life and can't find it in the *Daily Express* or the *Evening News*. They don't know what to believe, and there's no authority whose doctrines they accept. How can you blame them when our Bishops keep blackguarding each other and no two parsons agree on dogma or ritual?"

"I don't blame them," said Margaret. "I'm equally bewildered—between an Anglican father who believes we come from monkeys and a scientific husband who doesn't believe in God. Hopeless, isn't it? I've given it up."

He seemed distressed at these words.

"Oh! I wouldn't do that!" he exclaimed. "We're all lost unless we can hold on to some kind of faith. We must cling on to the Christian ideal. There's nothing but hell ahead without that."

Margaret told him something about Hesketh's ideas of speeding up the evolution of human intelligence and establishing an Age of Reason, but he didn't seem to think much of that. Nothing at all, in fact.

"Reason will never reconcile men and women to the inevitable sufferings of life," he said. "Nor to the inevitable approach of death, unless they believe in a future life with some kind of reward for courage and decency. Otherwise, why be decent? Why not let things rip, and grab what one can? Love, even if it's another man's wife. Self-gratification at all costs, here and now. That's what's the matter with the world. That's what the younger crowd proposes to do, and is mainly doing, unless they're restrained by illogical doubts, and an old-fashioned code based on Chris-

tian ethics which are still a faint tradition—growing fainter."

"Science has a high code," said Margaret, quoting Hesketh. "Truth at all costs. Self-sacrifice for the common good. Nobility of service."

"Not good enough," he answered. "There's no authority behind it. No soul to save. No divine hope. . . . That's why I envy the Roman Catholics. They claim an absolute authority of revelation and tradition. They don't hedge, and the poor Papists in my district—Irish mostly, I suppose—have a wonderful faith which seems to help them a lot."

"Aren't they very superstitious?" asked Margaret. She spoke as the daughter of an Anglican clergyman who hated Rome with a violence which was an exception to his usual tolerance, and as the wife of a scientist who had had no patience in Italian churches.

"Perhaps a little superstition is better than unbelief," said Richard Halliday. "I'm beginning to think so."

The tramp who had been sleeping on his shoulder suddenly sat bolt upright, and his battered bowler fell off to the ground. Richard Halliday picked it up for him and said, "Your hat, old man."

"Thanks," said the man, who was not old, but hardly middle-aged, with a pale unshaven face. "Rather chilly for the time of year, ain't it?"

"Out of work?" asked Halliday.

"Not a job for four years," said the man. "Nothing regular like. Still, there's many like me! The war, you know! Can't complain. Knocked things edgewise, didn't it? No bleeding good for those who fought!"

He noticed Halliday's clerical clothes, and apologised for his language.

"Didn't see you was a parson, governor!"

"That's all right," said Halliday. "I was in the bleeding war myself."

"Christ!" said the man, staggered by this surprising answer.

"Yes," said Halliday. "That's what I say! Christ was on the side of the down-and-outs. He understood all right. . . . Is that any good to you?"

He slipped a small coin into the man's hand and rose from the seat and smiled at Margaret.

"I've been talking too much. A great treat to me, but rough on you."

"I've enjoyed it," said Margaret. "I'll come to see you in Fulham one day if you'll let me. A pilgrimage in search of faith!"

He looked into her eyes with a smile and answered simply, "'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.' That's as far as I get mostly—though sometimes I have a sense of certainty which is rather—well—staggering. The other day in the Fulham Road . . ."

He did not say what had happened to him down the Fulham Road, but broke off abruptly with a laugh and said, "I expect you want a taxi."

She did, and he walked to the edge of the Park with her and hailed one.

"Waterloo Station," she said.

He gave the direction and stood for a moment with his hat off as she waved her hand to him. The tramp was edging his way towards him through a crowd of smartly dressed women waiting for a bus. Probably he was going to cadge another sixpence.

That night she told Hesketh of this strange conversation with her father's former curate, but he listened rather impatiently.

"A pathological case," he said. "Sex repression, I dare say. These celibate parsons tend to fanaticism."

"I rather fancy he's a saint," said Margaret.

"Very likely!" answered Hesketh. "But I've no use for saints myself. They dupe people with their mysticism and subjective illusions. We want to get away from all that magical religion. There's no sense in it, dear heart."

"He talked rather sensibly," said Margaret quietly. "Still, I admit he doesn't believe much in your Age of Reason, Hesketh! He seems to think the soul more important than the mind."

"Confound him for a clerical ass!" answered Hesketh good-humouredly.

Through the mirror she could see him tying his pyjamas and padding about the floor barefoot with tousled hair. He said something which she could not quite hear about "mind developed through evolution" and "no such thing as a supernatural soul." It was a repetition of their conversation that night he had been so angry with her mother. She wondered if he would be very scornful of her if she knelt down and said some of her old prayers. For a night or two on her honeymoon she had done that and had looked up to see him watching her with a humorous quizzical unbelieving smile. He had talked to her about "the subjective value of prayer" —the "mental effect of silence"—the "foolishness of thinking that some supernatural power heard and answered human petitions" and the "psychological benefit of auto-suggestion." Then she had given up the habit, except now and then privately, during the first few weeks of married life. To-night she felt like saying her prayers again because of an emotional crisis that had come to her. It was silly from a scientific point of view, Hesketh would say. It would be slipping back to childish sentiment now that she was married to Hesketh and Biology. No, she wouldn't risk such weakness with her husband watching her.

She finished doing her hair and glanced at Hesketh through the mirror again. He was doing some breathing exercises, which kept him young, he said. He touched the tips of his toes when she rose from her dressing-table and spoke to him.

"Hesketh," she said quietly, "I'm sorry you don't believe in a soul, because I think I'm going to have a baby, and it will be rather ridiculous if it doesn't have a soul, poor brat!"

He stood for a moment with his arms extended. A sudden light shone in his eyes, and he strode towards her and put his arms round her.

"Most dear and dearest," he said emotionally with tremendous adoration.

He was very much excited at the idea of having another child, with or without a soul.

XXXI

IT was a pity that Hesketh's happiness was clouded at this time by increasing anxiety about his father's ill-health. He telephoned for a doctor one day,—a young man named Widgery who had come to dinner once or twice and was extremely interested in Hesketh's research work. They had a long interview with the old gentleman upstairs in his workshop, while Margaret waited for them in the drawing-room, going to the door now and then to listen for any voices on the stairs. She had a real affection for Hesketh's father who had won her heart by his old-fashioned courtesy, and there was a kindly charm about him, a delicacy of mind and body which made him seem to her an exquisite type of old age before he became so morbid and melancholy. She was saddened by the thought that perhaps before her baby was born he would be dead and buried. Life—and death, they were both frightening. And one led to the other, so quickly! Without a future life, it seemed rather absurd really being born at all. What was the object? One had to worry so much, and suffer so much, and the whole thing was so bewildering that it seemed almost cruel to bring another little life into the world, just to grow up and die. Still, selfishly, she was glad she was going to have a baby. It would be so wonderful for her, such a toy to play with—a little Hesketh with a bald head to start with! She hoped it would be rather a freak in the Jerningham family—not so scientific and intellectual. She would like her son to be more like Guy—artistic and emotional, and sensitive to beauty.

There were voices on the stairs at last and Hesketh came down with the doctor. She heard them talking in the hall and Hesketh's voice was cheerful.

"Well, good night! Thanks very much, my dear fellow."

She heard Hesketh close the front door and come towards the drawing-room, and she dropped some needlework she was doing for her baby after taking lessons from Mrs. Squeede.

"What's the news, Hesketh?" she asked, as he came in whistling.

"We've decided on a little operation," he told her, and his voice had a tremor in it as though he were excited, although he looked happier than he had done for some days. "Father is perfectly willing—any amount of pluck!—and I've great hopes that it will do him good."

"Is it serious?" asked Margaret anxiously.

"Oh, Lord, no!" said Hesketh. "No danger at all. Nothing more than local anæsthetic needed, and six days or so in a nursing home. It's what we call vaso-ligature. Steinach's operation. Of course, it's experimental. One can't guarantee results, except on average experience. Still, it's enormously worth trying."

Margaret did not enquire further into the technical details. She felt dreadfully sorry for Mr. Jerningham when an ambulance arrived next morning with a hospital nurse and Hesketh brought him down into the hall. He looked old and withered and sad, but made a gallant attempt at gaiety before Cyril and Viola.

"Don't you think you've seen the last of your old man!" he said. "I'm coming back to plague you again."

"Young and sprightly again," said Viola. "Full of pep!"

He turned to Margaret and patted her hand.

"I'm very hopeful, my dear. Don't you look so worried about an old fellow like me. And take care of yourself. Hesketh told me that secret of yours. I'm so glad!"

Margaret put her arms about him and kissed him on the cheek. She wanted to cry a little, but kept her tears back.

"You've been very kind to me, my dear," he said. "I

don't forget it. You have been very gracious with your beauty to a crotchety old man."

He turned to Viola and drew her close with his right arm.

"You're still the baby," he said, "but you'll have your nose put out of joint one of these days when I'm a great-grandfather."

So he went in the white ambulance with Hesketh and the hospital nurse, not seeing Margaret's wet eyes.

Even Viola was rather emotional and blinked a little.

"Poor old granddad! I hope to goodness that operation is successful. The house would feel empty without him."

Cyril agreed rather gloomily, and then indulged in pessimism.

"You never can tell. I think it's a bit risky, personally. These experiments are all too recent."

"Oh, Steinach has done heaps of cases," said Viola. "Besides, father has made it dead certain."

"Not with human beings," said Cyril. "You know that as well as I do. It's all in the experimental stage."

They argued about something which Margaret did not understand, being outside this sort of discussion. Then Cyril made a bolt down the drive to catch his train to Town in time for his first lecture at King's College, and Viola retired into the garden to look after the rabbits who were on special diet for some new experiment.

She had an engagement that afternoon with Guy who was making a portrait of her.

XXXII

MR. JERNINGHAM returned a week later in the same white ambulance, looking weak and frail when he came into the hall leaning heavily on the nurse's arm. Margaret had gone up to the hospital every day and had sent in flowers, but had not been allowed to see him.

"Much better not," said Hesketh when she had protested against this. "He wants to lie quiet and avoid any kind of emotion or excitement. Widgery makes that an absolute rule."

Well, now he was back again, and very gradually the shadow which had been death seemed to pass from him. Certainly at the end of a fortnight he seemed to be regaining strength, and was wonderfully cheerful when Margaret sat by his bedside reading to him.

Once he interrupted her reading and took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"I dodged Old Man Death that time," he said with a chuckle. "I must say that Hesketh seems right about those glands of his. Well, I spent a lot of money on his education. It's only fair that I should get something back! . . . I'll be 'busting' atoms again before the month's out."

Before the month was out he came down to breakfast and announced that he was going to start work.

"A new lease of life!" he said, winking at Cyril. "I'm a remarkable case, young fellow. That man Widgery will be making a song and dance about me. But I'm not going to let him use my name. He can call me Mr. X. if he likes."

Margaret noticed that her husband and Cyril and Viola watched him curiously and intently at meal-times, and she was touched by their affection for the old man.

"Your appetite is wonderful, grandfather!" exclaimed Viola at lunch-time one day. "Do you really think you ought to have a second helping of roly-poly?"

"Why not?" he asked, with a new kind of chuckle he had developed since his return. "I'm feeling as hungry as a pterodactyl."

"Jolly good!" said Hesketh. "How did you sleep last night, father?"

"Like a top," said the old gentleman. "Barring a very delightful dream about youth and roses."

"Shame!" cried Viola, laughing with a shrill mirth.

His eyes were brighter and his skin no longer had the look of dried parchment. He began to walk more firmly and held himself upright. Margaret noticed very gladly that his sense of humour had come back, and that the old depression due to the secret fear of death had departed from him. He had more joy in life again and was working hard —too hard, she thought—at his experiments upstairs.

She reproached him for that at dinner one evening when he came down late after the gong had sounded.

"Excuse me, my dear," he said, "but I was absorbed in the development of some new radio-photographs. No reason for bad manners, I admit."

"You're working far too much," she told him. "It's only six weeks since that operation."

He laughed cheerily.

"I feel a young man," he assured her. "So young that unless I'm watched I shall probably run off with Mrs. Squeede or get amorous with that impudent rogue who dusts my room, and makes eyes at Cyril. Lucy, isn't it?"

He winked at Hesketh, who laughed heartily and was very glad at his father's return to health. Viola also thought that this joke of her grandfather's was very humorous indeed and gave a squeal of merriment.

"I shall tell Lucy not to stay with you alone, granddad.

You're not to be trusted in your second childhood. Don't you get flirting with me, young fellow!"

"Shut up, Viola!" said Cyril sharply. "There is a limit, you know."

He spoke with a sudden flush of anger, as though shocked for once at Viola's freedom of speech, though he ought to have been used to it and was very frank himself.

"Puritan!" jeered Viola. "What's come over the lad? I thought we had been suckled on science! . . . Besides, I'm a Behaviourist, as I think I've told you before. How can grandfather help his reflex actions any more than I can?"

"Oh, Lord!" growled Cyril. "What muck you do talk sometimes!"

"Not such muck as you think," retorted Viola, somewhat ruffled for once. "You ought to be psycho-analysed and liberated from the sinister complexes of your repressed instincts."

"I thought you said you were one of the Behaviourists," said Cyril with dark sarcasm. "They deny the subconscious."

"Not at all," said Viola. "They call it by a different name. The unverbalised."

"Well, leave it unverbalised," was Cyril's parting shot before he retreated to his own room.

XXXIII

AS the months passed in her suburban home, with occasional visits to Town, less frequent lately because of her health, Margaret became rather worried about Guy and Viola. They were seeing too much of each other, she thought, and it wasn't good for Guy's health or work. The curious thing was that they were always quarrelling with each other, sometimes, on Guy's side, with quite alarming bitterness, although mostly with a kind of Beatrice and Benedick rattle of verbal quips which were amusing to hear now and then. Viola seemed to find an unholy delight in accusing Guy of being a sentimentalist, a mushy-minded romantic, a mediævalist with a childlike ignorance of modern life amounting to mental blindness, and a complete ignoramus regarding science and its enormous importance to right thinking. Those were some of the epithets which Margaret heard in overheated arguments between those two in the drawing-room at Wimbledon, or on the Common where she went for walks with them, or in Guy's room at her old home, which was now littered with sketches of Viola in all her sprawling attitudes of grace. Guy did not take this abuse lying down. He retaliated by accusing Viola of being devoid of anything in the way of a soul (which she admitted, not believing in souls), utterly unconscious of the real values of life lying beyond the physical and the concrete (which she refused to admit), and one of those modern-minded females ("I glory in the thought!" said Viola) who had false ideas of liberty, no moral code of any kind, no mystery or reserve, which was the real charm of womanhood ("Bosh!" said Viola), and no respect for tradition, history, or the superior intelligence and morality of men.

It was that claim to superior intelligence which excited Viola's anger most furiously. Being a Behaviourist, and therefore not believing in Free Will, she protested that the moral charge left her cold. But to say that men had more intelligence than women was an argument which she would deny with her dying breath.

"But, my dear creature," said Guy very patiently—he was lying on the hearth-rug before Margaret's fire—"your own science, which you keep slinging at me, is dead up against you. Women's brains are half an ounce lighter than men's, and in that half-ounce lies all the little difference. What have women done in the world in the way of creative work? Where are the great musicians or the great artists, or the great philosophers? Where, for instance, is the female equivalent of Shakespeare?"

"Oh, Shakespeare!" exclaimed Viola, scornfully. "What about Madame Curie? Her discoveries of radio-activity are going to revolutionise the world. You ask grandfather or Cyril. Of course, we don't expect you to know anything about it! And what about Joan of Arc, and Catherine the Great, and Nurse Cavell, and Margaret Kennedy?"

Margaret found herself obliged to laugh at this strange combination of illustrious names.

"The truth is," said Guy, "that women are not meant to be intellectual beyond a certain point. It's not their part in the scheme of things. It's their destiny to provide the beauty and tenderness of life, to be a spiritual influence in the world, to keep men chivalrous and worshipful, to be loving wives and noble mothers or—if you *will* be immoral—adorable mistresses to whom we can write our sonnets, and for whom we work and fight."

He was talking mainly to arouse Viola's wrath and indignation—in which he succeeded perfectly—but Margaret guessed that underneath her brother's rhodomontade there was a strain of sincerity. She had heard him say these things more seriously, but less aggressively, when he sat

on the side of her bed or smoked his last cigarette in her room before she was married.

"Adorable mistresses! Loving wives! Noble mothers!" Viola almost choked over the words.

"Did you ever hear such disgusting conceit? As though women were just made to minister to the selfish arrogance of men! You've got it all wrong, Guy, my little one. That sort of thing belongs to the days of religious tyranny and social darkness. Think again. There are two million more women in this country than men. They have obtained economic independence. They have cut their skirts short."

"Yes," said Guy, looking at her knees, "and they've lost a lot of grace. From an artist's point of view."

"I loathe your artist's point of view!" said Viola. "Let me tell you, dear Guy, that the modern girl is physically and mentally free, and that men have got to mind their p's and q's, because we're just going to use them when we want them and have a profound contempt for their opinions, their selfish moralities, and their nerve reactions. We shall make love with them, now and then, certainly, but *on our own terms,* and without any respect or reverence for their intellectual superiority which we utterly deny. We shall make little pets of you, but preserve our independence. See?"

Guy didn't see. He warned her that the two million majority of women put them at a great disadvantage. It gave men the right of choice, and women would be left without their mates in a state of passionate competition for any fellow who might throw them a friendly glance!

Viola threatened him with the red-hot end of the poker, and afterwards chased him with a cushion so that one of the drawing-room chairs was broken.

"I hate this rough stuff!" cried Guy plaintively. "It's childish. It's undignified . . . It's . . . It's palæolithic!"

But it was Viola who won in a rough-and-tumble. Guy with his delicate figure and sense of chivalry (which was even more of a handicap) was no match for an Amazon,

ruthless and unsporting and eager for victory. When he slipped over a footstool she was on him like a tigress, until he pleaded for mercy.

"For goodness' sake!" cried Margaret. "You two will be the death of me. Why can't you stop these endless arguments?"

But she was not quite sure that they quarrelled with each other as much in private as they made out publicly. She was indeed seriously disturbed one afternoon when she came down from her bedroom and heard voices in Hesketh's study. The door was open slightly and she saw that the room was in darkness, except for the red glimmer of the gas-fire. Why hadn't they turned the lights up, she wondered for a moment.

"Guy!" said Viola. "Kiss me again. You're not shy of me, are you?"

"Yes," he said. "Alarmed! . . . Isn't it a bit—dangerous?"

"What's the harm?" asked Viola. "Conscience-stricken, my little one? I hate that sensitive conscience of yours. It's so inhibiting! . . . Kiss me, Guy."

Margaret crept away from the door and went into the drawing-room. She hadn't meant to play the spy like that. She wished she hadn't overheard. She felt rather faint, and stood with her hands pressed to her breast. What did it mean—that love-making between that boy and girl? Guy was not twenty-one yet and Viola was only eighteen. Besides, it would be deplorable if they fell in love with each other. They were utterly unsuited. Viola was so wild and reckless, and Guy so sensitive and shy. They hadn't an idea in common. He believed in tradition and religion. Lately he had been talking to her about ritual and Catholicism which was beginning to attract him a good deal. He had been arguing with his father about it, much to his annoyance. He was further away from Viola in temperament and outlook than she was from Hesketh. There would be a spiritual

gulf between them, and the same unhappiness which she had been through herself until she had slipped from any definite form of religion because of loyalty to Hesketh and painful doubts. In any case that kissing in the dark was unhealthy and dangerous. . . . Her idealist Guy was conscience-stricken, and Viola was tempting him. She would have to speak to Hesketh about it.

At tea-time they came in, quarrelling again. This time it was some absurd argument about a play called *The Letter*. Guy thought it disgusting. Viola thought it wonderful. . . . They disagreed with a good deal of verbal intensity. But once when Margaret was looking at Guy he saw her glance and avoided her eyes. It was the first time that his look had not been straight and she felt a sharp pang like a dagger prick at her heart. She and Guy had talked without mental reservations ever since childhood. Now he was hiding a secret from her, and she hadn't the courage to question him about it.

Before speaking to Hesketh she had a word with Cyril as she passed the open door of his bedroom that night on her way to bed. He was sitting in a cane arm-chair, taking off his boots, and greeted her with a friendly "Come in! . . . Take a pew."

"No, I won't sit down," she said. "It's getting late. But I want to ask you something—in confidence. May I?"

"Good Lord, yes. Any old thing! . . . Worried?"

"Is there anything between Viola and Guy?" she asked.

Cyril grinned, and kicked off one of his boots.

"I rather fancy that Viola is beginning to feel the urge of sex. Rather amusing, after all her talk! . . . Guy is getting scared, I think."

"So am I," said Margaret.

"No need for you to worry," he assured her cheerfully, standing up in his socks. "Viola can look after herself—she's full of biological knowledge!—And if Guy's wise he'll do a bunk before things get serious."

"I'm afraid they're serious now," she said anxiously, but she didn't tell him of that little scene she had overheard. That wouldn't be fair.

Cyril laughed at her expression of worry and dismay.

"Young love, eh? Do you think your idealistic brother has fallen for Viola? Hard luck on him if that's so! They'll quarrel like cat and dog, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, till death do them part—if it lasts as long as that, which is most unlikely."

"That's what I'm afraid of," said Margaret. "They think in different ways."

"Do either of them think at all?" asked Cyril with his usual irony.

He kicked a boot across the floor, and then took off his coat and waistcoat.

"Thank goodness, I'm immune from amorous desires. Science is good enough for me. Much more amusing, really."

Margaret smiled at him. It was not many months since she had heard Guy say that he was "immune." Now he had been kissing Viola in a darkened room. Nobody could be immune from that queer passion which caught hold of one suddenly. She had thought herself so safe until she had trembled before a smile behind horn-rimmed glasses, and fallen in love with a man old enough to be her father.

"Don't boast!" she warned him. "There's a girl waiting for you somewhere."

"I'll let her wait till all's blue," he said icily. "Blast the woman! Sex is nothing but a damn nuisance."

Then he took off his shirt and went to the basin to wash himself, stripped to the waist, so that Margaret thought it time to leave him, although he said "Don't go!"

"You're all so indecent in this house," she told him with a laugh.

"Oh, Lord," he said, "does that worry you?"

He gave her the finger of a wet hand and said, "Sleep

well! . . . As for Viola and your innocent brother, I'd just let things take their course and watch the comedy, free of charge."

"It may be a tragedy," said Margaret. "Viola is so—uncertain. So pagan."

Cyril grinned.

"The Wenus of Wimbledon. . . . Heaven help her victims."

She said good night to him and decided to consult Hesketh on the subject. But Hesketh came up late that night from his laboratory and she was asleep before he came.

XXXIV

SOMETHING prevented Margaret from discussing Guy and Viola with her husband. She was afraid he would only laugh at her and defend Viola whatever she did or chose to do. To him Viola was the type of girlhood in which he most believed—the hope of the future—because of her fearlessness and frankness of thought, her biological knowledge, which he had taught her from babyhood, and her splendid health and physique. She was the ideal girl of his Age of Reason and he saw no wrong in her. Any doubt on the subject from Margaret would only make him suspect that she was jealous of her own stepdaughter (as indeed she was, just enough to make her guard against such foolishness), and it was the last thought in the world which she would put into his head.

And there was something else she wanted to talk to him about. Something rather sinister and frightening. It was something that had happened to Mr. Jerningham—"Grandfather," as she had now learnt to call him. Some extraordinary change had taken place in him since his operation. His health was wonderful and his activity quite extraordinary. He thought nothing now of walking on the Common with her for quite a long time, and he trotted about his own room all day, when he was working, without getting tired. But gradually since his illness a curious mental change had come over him—even more than a mental change. It was as though he had been altered spiritually, if one believed in a spiritual side of life. And it wasn't an improvement. It was a kind of degradation. He had been so exquisite in his manners when she had first known him, so delicate and charming in a thousand ways, but now she noticed that he

was becoming careless, for instance, about his behaviour at table. He ate greedily and dropped food down his waistcoat, or did not wipe his mouth when he had been eating porridge or jam. Once he stretched right across her without an apology to get the butter, and she was so startled by this rudeness that she watched him closely and was shocked by the expression of his face. There was a kind of animal look in his eyes, or something even worse—a goblin look. Perhaps it was only her fancy. She wondered if she were becoming neurasthenic and imagining things.

And yet there could be no imagination about the tone of his conversation. It wasn't pleasant, even making full allowance for a scientific family. Some of the stories he told, with little chuckles and winks, made even Cyril raise his eyebrows, although Viola did not seem to mind them. They were the sort of stories that might be told in an officers' mess, she imagined, or perhaps by medical students before they had been sobered down by knowledge of life and death. . . . Hesketh was nervous of them and tried to interrupt some of them by switching off the conversation. It was almost as though that operation had altered his whole character and coarsened him. She was afraid of going into his room now because he had a habit of fondling her hands, not as formerly when he had patted them in a grandfatherly way, but as a lover might do—as Hesketh often did. And one afternoon he came towards her with a flushed face and a queer look in his eyes, and took hold of her arm very tightly and said silly things.

"You're a very beautiful young woman, Margaret. Have you any idea how attractive you are?"

"I'm glad you think I'm beautiful, grandfather," she said. "It's not the first time you've told me."

She laughed, but nervously, because of that look in his eyes. It was as though a young lover were looking at her through an old man's mask.

He held her arm tighter and whispered:

"I'd like to give you a kiss, my dear. On your lips. You needn't tell Hesketh."

"Why, grandfather!" she cried, "I've often kissed you."

She kissed him then, on the cheek, but for some reason he seemed repulsive to her so that she felt something cold run up her spine.

"On the lips," he said. "Why not? You're not afraid of an old man!"

She was afraid, though she could not tell why. She pushed him away from her with both hands, gently and yet strongly, so that he had to grasp the back of a chair to steady himself.

"Grandfather," she said. "Please! Do not look at me like that."

"Like what?" he asked, with a strange smile that was like a leer. "It's only my admiration for you. You're like an English rose—my favourite flower. Exquisite and fragrant! Alluring, my dear!"

"I must go," she said hurriedly. "I hear Viola shouting for me."

She fled from the room and ran downstairs so fast that she was breathless and felt her heart beating with a heavy thud. Some uncanny sense of horror was on her and she stood at the drawing-room door, white-faced, with a hand tight to her side where that heart was beating, rather faint and sick. She was certain something had happened to Mr. Jerningham, something that had changed him abominably.

Viola was having tea in front of the fire.

She turned round and looked at Margaret and saw the whiteness of her face, and sprang up suddenly with a look of alarm.

"Hullo, old thing! Anything wrong?"

"A touch of faintness," said Margaret.

Viola was concerned, and helpful.

"You've got to be careful, you know! . . . You'll have to look after yourself for the next few months. Let me pour you out a cup of tea, Mrs. Hesketh Jerningham."

That night in her bedroom Margaret spoke to her husband, and told him of what had happened—the fright his father had given her.

"What does it mean?" she asked. "That awful change in him? Why should he speak to me like that, Hesketh, and want to kiss me—in a beastly kind of way?"

Hesketh laughed quietly, but looked slightly disturbed.

"It's perfectly natural," he explained. "He has the instincts of youth again. The Steinach operation—Widgery uses the same method—has that effect as a rule. It's one of the penalties of rejuvenation—or one of its rewards!"

"Rejuvenation!" exclaimed Margaret with a look of astonishment and consternation.

"Well, for want of a better name," said Hesketh. "Of course, the interesting thing is to know how long it will last. So far father is a marvellous case. Widgery agrees with me. Have you noticed the improved texture of his skin, and the brightness of his eyes? He tells me that his powers of concentration have returned and that his memory has never been better. Even his hair is coming back—quite a little down where he was getting bald!"

"But, Hesketh," said Margaret, rather breathlessly again, "do you mean to say he has been rejuvenated? Like your experiments on monkeys and rabbits?"

"Exactly," said Hesketh. "Surely you knew that? Haven't we all been talking about it for weeks? The Steinach operation. My experiments have carried it much further since Steinach began. He acknowledges his indebtedness to me, and it's wonderful to think that my own father is benefiting from my research work. I think that's rather splendid!"

Margaret was silent for some moments, staring at her husband with a look in her eyes that startled him.

"It's horrible," she said. "Hesketh, I think it's horrible!" Tears came into her eyes and she began to weep, at first quietly and then with a sort of passion, so that Hesketh was alarmed and put his arms about her.

XXXV

MARGARET became foolishly frightened about having a child, and was very sorry for herself when she had to lie up for that event. It was all very embarrassing, although nobody else seemed to think so, except perhaps Audley Instone to whom she had confided her secret one day when he looked hurt because she would not go up to Town with him. Lately she had made a habit of meeting him once a week or so at Prince's for tea-table-talk and a dance or two. It was a relief from Wimbledon, and he was always so charming. Nobody overhearing their conversation could have accused them of frivolity or sentiment. They talked about such things as Italy and the Fascist experiment and the possibility of another war in Europe, which Audley said was not enormously remote unless France and Germany would make a friendly alliance and keep the smaller nations quiet—anyhow, that was the Foreign Office opinion—and sometimes they discussed Viola and Guy, and Audley wondered why Guy seemed a little hostile to him, and so on, in a perfectly simple sensible way, almost like brother and sister. She never felt a prick of conscience about these hours with Audley of which she made no secret to Hesketh. She never felt a shade of nervousness about Audley himself, lest he should make love to her or be foolishly emotional about her in the way that novelists seem to think inevitable when there is any friendship between a man and woman. They just liked to talk to each other and to be together now and then. Perhaps, as far as he was concerned, it was because he did not seem to get on very well with his people who were rich snobs, it seemed, from a few things he said. He avoided his mother's receptions crowded with wealthy Americans and financial magnates and smart women,

who, in his opinion, were mostly brainless, and utterly heartless, though she couldn't quite believe it and accused him of being bitter and intolerant. Anyhow, he preferred to talk to her, he assured her, and that was a compliment to her intelligence, which was surprising and pleasant because she could never admit that she had any brains worth mentioning.

Always she contrasted Audley with Guy and Cyril. He was a little older and quite different—not so sensitive and shy as Guy, who was always introspective and moody and idealistic, not so frank and abrupt and cynical as Cyril, who had the scientific mind and hated "parlour manners" as he called any kind of social behaviour. Audley was just the average Englishman of her own class, wonderfully good-looking, with perfect manners, and with a simple straight-thinking mind which did not pretend to be brilliant, and hated any deviation from the conventional code of a public-school education. Hesketh said that this type was the curse of England, because it was perfectly satisfied with leaving things exactly as they were, and created a kind of inertia of self-satisfaction and hatred of change against which science and all attempts at social progress vainly battled. But she saw more in Audley than that! It was his type, she supposed, which had saved England in the war—all those young officers who had volunteered directly the call came, and had died by hundreds of thousands without question as a matter of simple duty, which they didn't like—but did. Two of his elder brothers had died like that. He would be ready for the same service if he were ever needed.

Once she had a little shock when she found him waiting for her at Prince's. A shaft of sunlight from a side window touched his profile, and just for a second it seemed to her that she recognised him as that shining knightly figure who had appeared to her in day-dreams before her marriage, when she was a sentimental little creature, feeling the urge of love. She was ashamed of such a thought—"slushy" as Betty Winter would say—and she blushed at herself when

he came forward with a sudden smile in his eyes at the sight of her and said, "Thanks for coming!" He was always alarmingly polite, taking her cloak off, fussing about her comfort, and all that, and he ordered the waiters about with wonderful self-assurance, and was perfectly at his ease when girls came into Prince's with other partners and said, "Hullo, Audley!" as they passed. Very pretty and charming some of those girls were, and Margaret wondered why he did not choose one of them for tea-table conversation rather than herself. Once she had asked him that, but he had smiled in an enigmatical way and said something about "being hard to please" and "fond of a quiet life! . . ."

No, she had never felt a shade of nervousness about this friendship of theirs, except just for one second perhaps one afternoon when they had been to the National Gallery together to look at the Flemish School which he was rather keen about. She felt rather faint, quite suddenly, and had to sit down on one of the long seats in the centre of the room. Fortunately the only people in the room at the time were half a dozen schoolgirls with a governess who were chattering round Rembrandt's portrait of himself.

"Don't worry, Audley," said Margaret. "I shall feel all right in a second."

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed, very worried indeed. "I'm most frightfully sorry. Is there anything I can do? Shall I ask one of the attendants for a glass of water?"

She smiled and shook her head.

"It's nothing."

She shut her eyes for a few moments and knew that she looked as white as she felt. Then the pain and the faintness passed and when she opened her eyes again she saw Audley staring at her. There was a look in his eyes that startled her, because of its intensity of devotion and anxiety. It was then that the thought passed through her mind—so hurriedly that it left no lingering doubt—that perhaps Audley

was too fond of her to be fair to himself. An idiotic idea which she put out of her head instantly.

"You're looking very unwell," he said. "You ought to see a doctor. Won't you let me drive you up to Harley Street, here and now?"

She laughed at him. Harley Street didn't want to be besieged by women who felt slightly faint after a morning's shopping. She wondered if he guessed what was the matter with her. But she felt quite sure that he didn't, until that day when he looked unhappy because she would not come up to Town again. He had driven over to Wimbledon one Sunday afternoon, when Guy and Viola were off on some expedition together and when Cyril had gone for a walk with Hesketh.

"I'm afraid you find me a bore," he said. "I thought perhaps we were friends enough not to mind being bored. I mean, for you not to mind being bored with me!"

That was at the end of his visit when he was going to drive back to Town again.

"It's not that," she said. "You never bore me, Audley. It's quite a different reason why I can't come dancing with you."

"Then what reason?" he asked patiently and politely. "We dance together wonderfully well! Surely—"

There was a little wrinkle on his forehead and a puzzled smile in the line of his lips.

She guessed what he was thinking and answered him.

"No, Hesketh doesn't mind! . . . The truth is, Audley, I'm going to have a baby. It's a thing that happens to married women."

He was quite staggered, and became pale for a moment.

"Oh, Lord!" he said in a low voice. "I'm sorry . . . I mean—I'm glad."

"Forgive me for telling you," she said. "But it's no good making a dark secret of it."

"Thanks for telling me," he answered simply, and he went away, still looking worried and rather upset, she thought. Perhaps she ought not to have told him so soon. She forgot sometimes that most people were not so free spoken as the Jerningham family to whom she now belonged, and whose habits of mind were changing hers. Audley might have thought her lacking in the ordinary reticence of people like themselves. And yet it was better to tell him than let him think that she was tired of his friendship. And, anyhow, he was bound to know before long.

XXXVI

YES, she was becoming frightened about having a child. A matter of nerves, she supposed. Sometimes when she thought about it a cold terror took possession of her. It was utterly unreasonable, of course, but then reason did not help her much, in spite of Hesketh who tried to cheer her up and told her there was nothing whatever to be frightened about. He was very tender and considerate when he wasn't utterly absorbed in his research work, and came to her room to sit by her bedside when she felt too tired to get up for breakfast. He was as happy and excited at the prospect of a son as though Cyril and Viola didn't exist already, and sometimes he talked humorous nonsense about it, mixed up with his scientific theories.

"That young fellow who is coming," he said one day, while he held her hand, "will be a leader of the New World—heir to the latest achievements in science which are going to rid the world of darkness and disease. What luck to be born in this year of grace!"

"Think so, Hesketh?" she said, smiling and stroking his hand.

"No more wars to claim young manhood for the shambles," he explained. "Europe is settling down to peace, I honestly believe."

"Audley isn't sure," thought Margaret, but she didn't argue the point.

"No more fears and tortures in the child mind," said Hesketh. "We're beginning to understand child psychology. Old Freud has turned his searchlight on to the subconscious and shown the enormous importance of early environment and right upbringing. That is why Viola and Cyril have such a pull over youngsters of a previous generation."

"Certainly Viola seems very happy," said Margaret. She wasn't quite sure about Cyril. Sometimes she thought he brooded over things and had secret troubles which made him cynical and rather bitter, as though life did not satisfy him. "Nothing matters," he had told her once or twice, but that did not seem a cheerful form of philosophy.

"We're pushing off old age," said Hesketh, continuing his prophecies of good things for the unborn babe. "Why, that boy of ours, Margaret, may retain his adolescence until he's a bright young lad of sixty, or, if it's a girl, keep all her freshness and beauty as a charming young flapper of seventy odd. Those ductless glands I'm working at—rather a joke, eh?"

"They'll have to die in the end," said Margaret rather miserably. She wondered sometimes if she might die in having this baby. The thought frightened her.

"Perhaps the babies of the future won't know death," said Hesketh, smiling at her through his horners. "Why should they? I don't believe in death! It's an old superstition to which we have been enslaved too long."

He laughed heartily at the absurdity of his own prophecy.

"Of course I'm talking nonsense. The best we can do is to push off the grisly monster and keep him waiting a few more years—ten or twenty on our present average. I believe we'll do it. Look at father!"

Margaret was silent. That "rejuvenation" of Hesketh's father still made her feel distressed, with a shrinking disgust which she failed to overcome. She had never withdrawn that cry of "Horrible!" when Hesketh had first told her. Grandfather was no longer the delicate and refined old man she had first known. Another character looked out of his eyes, although Hesketh refused to admit it. They had tampered with him and hurt his soul. She was dreadfully certain of it. Only yesterday, Mrs. Squeede—Squeaky, as Viola called her—had complained that Mr. Jerningham had been getting

"fresh" with the pretty housemaid. He had kissed her bare arm and Mrs. Squeede didn't blame her because she threatened to give him "what for" with her broom.

"I can't think what's come over the poor old dear," said Mrs. Squeede. "At his age, too! Now if it had been Master Cyril—"

Margaret had not encouraged this conversation, but it was quite clear that Mrs. Squeede had noticed some change in Hesketh's father which puzzled her.

"Anyhow," said Hesketh cheerfully, "this child of ours is going to be born into a time of good hope, my dear. The Air Age. The Age of Light. The Age of Reason. It's worth while bringing a babe into the world, sweetheart."

He bent down and kissed her so that his moustache tickled her forehead.

"Hesketh," she said, "supposing I die?"

He laughed at her fears again.

"Rubbish! Stuff and nonsense! Don't you look so scared, little girl, it's all right—nothing to be afraid of in the least. Die? Why, there's a flower garden in your cheeks. Roses all a-blowing and a-blooming. Six a penny!"

"Hesketh," she said again, "if there's no future life, death is rather dreadful, isn't it? Just to end, in blackness. It makes me afraid."

"Courage!" he answered, putting his arms all round her. "Courage, sweetheart. There's nothing to worry about."

But he shirked that question of hers. He did not give her any hope about a future life. Then he went away to doctor up his monkeys, and find out something more about the prolongation of life, but not quick enough perhaps to make any difference to a rather frightened wife.

Then Viola came into the room very merry and bright as usual. There was no worry in *her* mind about a future life or imminent death. She was alarmingly vital. It was impossible to believe that she would ever grow old and

feeble. She was frank and cheery as usual about the child that was coming and wished to goodness that she might have a baby too, one day.

"It must be so wonderfully amusing," she remarked. "It's the supreme fulfilment of one's personality—an awfully jolly adventure in creative evolution."

Some time ago it would have seemed outrageous to Margaret to hear such ideas from a girl like Viola, hardly nineteen, as she sat by the fire-place with her short hair, tawny where it caught the light, and her hands clasped round her knees, a tall graceful long-legged thing with brown eyes and a curved mouth. But Margaret was quite used to that sort of conversation now, and only smiled at her.

"Like one of Hesketh's rabbits!" she answered.

"Yes," said Viola. "Nothing more natural. But that's the glory of it. One becomes a personal agent in the progress of evolution—part of the vital continuity which has developed us from the amœba to people like you and me, Margaret—rather good specimens of the human species, eh?"

She laughed at this self-conceit and shook back her short hair.

"Your baby ought to go one better—with father's brains and your beauty. A jolly good object-lesson in the higher Eugenics."

"Oh, dear," cried Margaret, "poor little baby! I hate to think of it in that way."

"That's what it's going to mean to the world," said Viola, laughing at Margaret's dismay.

She came and sprawled on the bed and said something which alarmed Margaret very much.

"Do you think Guy and I would make a good father and mother one of these days?"

"Viola!" cried Margaret. "How *can* you say such things?"

"Why not?" asked Viola with that wide-eyed look of hers. "One must think about them and it's not good repressing

such thoughts and creating a complex. You know perfectly well that Guy is getting soppy about me and that I'm ridiculously in love with him."

"You're both far too young to think about such things," said Margaret, trying to speak calmly but seriously distressed by this confession. Since that time when she had overheard them talking secretly she had been worrying herself about them both, and even lying awake at night sometimes with this worry nagging in her mind. It was Guy she was afraid of. He was so romantic and highly strung. It would be so easy for Viola to hurt him by carelessness. And though he avoided his sister's eyes now sometimes she had seen that he was desperately taken by Viola's grace and vitality, and was afraid of the passion this girl stirred in him against his will, and perhaps (so Margaret guessed, unhappily) against his conscience and ideals.

"Oh, Lord, no!" said Viola alluding to that protest about their youth. "Juliet was only sixteen, wasn't she, when she took up with Romeo? Modern girls wait far too long for their first love affair. . . . The only thing about Guy is that we disagree intellectually about almost everything in the world. He's a mediævalist with some extraordinary thing called Conscience which keeps biting him and saying 'don't do this!' and 'don't do that!' and 'am I behaving like a little gentleman?' and 'is it Christian or Anglo-Catholic to kiss a girl in a darkened room?' and 'is this according to the code of Harrow?' . . . When as you well know, Margaret, I'm a modernist and a Behaviourist, entirely devoid of conscience—what *is* that foolish complex?—and as natural as a naked nymph in Arcady. It's a bit of a bore, really—Guy being so different. And yet I like the lad and want to be kind to him."

She rattled on, not knowing the acute anxiety she was causing Margaret, astounded when Margaret suddenly sat up in bed, white-faced and angry, and terribly distressed.

"Viola!" she cried, "if ever you hurt him I'll hate you!"

She began to cry weakly, with the tears running through her fingers as she pressed them against her face.

Viola was bewildered and amazed.

"Bless the lady!" she said. "What's come over her now? Whatever have I said to upset the poor darling? . . . Why, Guy and I are all right. There's nothing to fret about. We haven't gone off the deep end, or anything like that. Margaret, honour bright, I haven't hurt a hair on his head, and his chaste young soul remains unsullied, as far as I'm concerned! *Sans peur et sans reproche.*"

Margaret wiped her eyes and felt rather ashamed of herself.

"Sorry," she said. "It's this weakness that makes me feel so foolish . . . Only do be careful, Viola. Guy is so young, and you're so wild."

"Wild but wise," said Viola calmly. "And out of my wisdom I advise you to have a little snooze and stop worrying about a baby brother who is perfectly able to look after himself, I assure you. The things that boy says to me sometimes—the scorn with which he attacks my simple philosophy of life—"

She gave a ripple of laughter and put her arms round Margaret and kissed her wet cheek.

Well, as she said, it was no use worrying.

XXXVII

CYRIL sloped into her room that morning when Viola had gone to do her job in Hesketh's laboratory. He was as untidy as his father, in a pair of grey flannel trousers, preposterously baggy, and an old jacket from which he produced his pipe which he sucked unlighted.

"Going strong?" he asked.

"Feeling weak," she answered, with a smile. "Blue funk, Cyril! Bring your gramophone and turn on a jazz tune. I'll dance in my head until I find my feet again."

Before he went for the gramophone he filled up his pipe and threw off one or two remarks in a casual, cynical way, which was really meant to be sympathetic.

"This sort of thing must be an awful bore for women. Rather a silly system, it seems to me. The biologists of the future—"

"Oh, you and your biology!" laughed Margaret.

He grinned and polished his pipe on the side of his nose.

"Yes, one talks an awful lot of muck sometimes, especially about biology. It's father's fault. He lets his imagination have free rein. He ought to collaborate with Wells. Personally I think chemistry and physics the only sound stuff. One has to keep closer to the facts, although radio-activity gives a chance for morbid imaginings if one has a weakness that way . . . Would it poison you if I smoked a pipe?"

She allowed him to smoke a pipe. She liked this boy Cyril with his brooding eyes, and friendly smile, and utter frankness of speech when he was not plunged into enormous depths of silence. She often wondered what went on in his mind during those silences. She wondered now as he sat smoking his pipe on the fender with his trousers pulled up above his socks.

"Cyril, what do you think about so much?"

"Do I think?" he asked, looking surprised at the idea.

"Are you worrying about life or anything?"

"Oh, Lord, no! What's the use of worrying!"

His lips twisted into a smile and then he lapsed into silence again, until five minutes later when she asked him another question.

"Cyril, do you ever feel the need of religion? I mean, are you satisfied to go on without knowing whether there's a God or not? Or any life after this one?"

He shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Not much use bothering, is it? Difficult to find out."

"Yes," said Margaret. "But do you want to find out, Cyril? I do most frightfully. You see, I might die—in a few days now. And that frightens me. I shouldn't feel so frightened if I thought there was something else afterwards, and remembrance of this life and—well—a knowledge of what was happening to Hesketh and you and Guy, and everyone. It's so awful just to die."

"Pretty rotten," he agreed thoughtfully.

After some minutes of thoughtfulness it seemed to occur to him that his answer had been inadequate.

"I quite see your point," he said. "But if I were you I wouldn't worry over that sort of thing. There's no reason why you should die, just yet. Most women have babies all right, don't they?"

"Not always," said Margaret.

Cyril puffed his pipe again and then spoke rather slowly as though trying to express difficult thoughts.

"Between ourselves, you know, I don't think the governor's philosophy of life is altogether sound. The Age of Reason and all that—it's bunk, really! I rather think there's something beyond the natural mechanism of life. Ideas, for instance. They seem to have a life of their own. Then when one begins to know something about the physical world —atoms and all that stuff—it rather looks as though matter

isn't so damned material as one used to think. In its last analysis it's rather like spirit. Personality is more real in a way than what we call reality. Sometimes I have a notion that there's a mind moving independently of matter, controlling its energy, and producing its patterns. What happens doesn't seem to be accidental. It's all so orderly—the whole universe down to the structure of the atom. There's a law in it, as far as I can make out, and you can't get a law without intelligence. At least, it's difficult to think so."

"Intelligence?" asked Margaret anxiously. "God, do you mean?"

Cyril laughed as though amused by this sudden jump to a great conclusion.

"Call it God, if you like! Why not? An intelligence making things, or causing them to be made, by a long process of evolution or unwinding—isn't that the same thing as God?"

"With love for the things He makes?" asked Margaret as though this boy Cyril might have some special knowledge which would comfort her and give her courage.

He hedged over that, and laughed again, though he answered seriously.

"Well, I don't know anything about that. But life seems extraordinarily foolish without some explanation beyond biochemistry and physics. As you say, what's it all about and what's the good of it all if it doesn't lead to something better than one damn thing after another?"

"I didn't say so," said Margaret. "But that's what I think sometimes. . . . Although I want to be loyal to Hesketh."

Cyril made a surprising statement—quite amazing really to Margaret, his stepmother.

"Personally I wish the governor had brought us up with some kind of religion. Any decent superstition rather than blank unbelief."

"Oh, Cyril!" cried Margaret startled by this confession from Hesketh's son, and strangely thrilled by it.

"Viola and I miss something," he said. "We're quite lawless, really. Morality and so forth—why be moral in a more or less Christian country? Who says so? What authority accepted by science? It's quite unreasonable to be moral. Personally I have tremendous leanings towards immorality."

"Oh!" gasped Margaret. "I can't believe that."

He smiled at her as he sucked his pipe, and blew out a long whiff of smoke.

"It's true. Only I'm restrained by the faint survivals of the Christian superstition in the social code of Wimbledon. Besides, I'm too busy to muck about."

Margaret looked at him to know how far he was serious. That was always the trouble with Cyril and Viola. They talked so mockingly, hiding behind laughter.

"Have you ever discussed these things with Hesketh?" she asked curiously.

"Oh, Lord, no! For heaven's sake don't give me away to the governor."

He looked quite scared until she had promised not to repeat a word of their conversation.

"Well," he said presently, "I'll fetch that gramophone downstairs . . . And I shouldn't worry, if I were you."

She lay back with her eyes closed while he went upstairs to get the gramophone, and then caught hold of his hand before he went away to his work again.

"Cyril," she said, very solemnly, "if I come through all right, will you help me to find out about God? As a secret between you and me?"

He laughed quite loudly.

"What a funny kid you are! . . . It's absurd your being the governor's wife."

"I know," she said. "I'm much too stupid."

"Much too young," said Cyril. "I can't think why you married him."

"I fell in love with him!"

"He ought to be ashamed of himself," said Cyril. "Baby-snatching, I call it. You and I would have made a better match of it."

She blushed very deeply and threatened to throw her water-bottle at him.

"Cyril! You and Viola are outrageous. You say the most frightful things."

"It's the governor's fault," said Cyril. "He taught us to blurt out our secret thoughts from infancy onwards. It's a mistake really, but we can't help ourselves now . . . Well, keep smiling."

XXXVIII

GUY came to see her once a week or so and generally stayed to dinner. Afterwards, when she had gone to bed early, she could hear the gramophone playing as Guy and Viola danced together, much to her envy. Hesketh was working late these nights on some paper he was writing and now and then brought his work into her room, because she liked to have him there and to watch him as he bent his head over his writing-block puzzling over some word in order to express the exact sense of some scientific thought. It was that address he was going to deliver to the British Association summing up all his research and philosophy under the title of the Age of Reason.

While he was there working so silently, and so utterly absorbed that he had quite forgotten her, all sorts of thoughts and fancies passed through her mind. She had a craving once or twice to see Richard Halliday, that clergyman who worked down in the Fulham Road. A talk with him, she thought, might give her courage for the ordeal she had to face, and courage was oozing out of her, leaving her afraid. If only she could get faith back again—that childish faith which had once been hers. She would like to go to Richard Halliday and say, "I want to believe. Help me to believe." And yet if she did believe it would make a great gulf between her and Hesketh. They wouldn't be spiritually married if she had a religion which he scoffed at as a "going back to darkness." It would be better really—more loyal—if she could get over this craving for some spiritual conviction, a need for supernatural faith, and be his intellectual wife understanding his ideas, helping to spread them, being of use to him like Viola, who was the child of his mind.

And yet she never could. That was certain. Sometimes she hated his ideas. She was getting to hate the very name of biology. It would be dreadful if one day she came to hate Hesketh himself because of his ideas. It seemed to happen like that, sometimes, in marriage. Husband and wife drifted apart. Perhaps at first they had just a little difference of opinion and then it widened until their minds were apart and everything in their nature so that they hated each other.

It was his consent to the operation on his father which had shocked her most. It seemed so hideous to experiment like that on one's father—or any human being. Perhaps if her baby were born delicate he would begin experimenting with the poor little thing—taking out one of its glands or putting in some other—just as if it were one of his tadpoles, and it might turn out all wrong and become a monster or something dreadful. Perhaps a criminal . . . That dead tadpole which he had taken out of his waistcoat pocket when they were married—perhaps it was symbolical really. She had married a biologist instead of an ordinary man. She had married biology!

Perhaps she would have been happier if she had married Audley Instone, who was more like herself—just ordinary—and young like herself. It was awfully good of him to be friends with her still—"Platonic," as they used to say at Somerville, without any nonsense. She was sorry he had been so upset when she told him she was going to have a baby. Perhaps, after all, she ought not to see so much of him. She would be more careful if she came through this thing. It wasn't quite fair on him . . . He was much better looking than Hesketh and, after all, youth had a quality which didn't belong to middle age. There was something splendid about Audley's good looks. He would have made a charming lover, if it had happened that way for her . . . Hesketh's bald patch was spreading a little. Lately he had been looking rather grey and tired. She wished sometimes

that he wouldn't work so hard and forget all about her. He was really old enough to be her father.

She called out to him suddenly.

"Hesketh!"

He looked up from his writing-block and smiled at her.

"What's the matter, sweetheart?"

"You know I love you, don't you?" she asked.

"Do you think I doubt it?"

His quiet laugh was reassuring.

Perhaps the devil had put all those thoughts into her head. Even if there wasn't a God there might be a devil! She hadn't thought of that before. She had been thinking strange and dreadful things. Hesketh would say they were her subconscious mind at work—ideas produced by repressed instincts and climbing up to consciousness when the intellectual control was weak, or something of the sort. She felt weak and ill. She hadn't been thinking really. It was a kind of dream, a waking nightmare and horrible. There must be evil in her to have such thoughts. She had been disloyal to Hesketh, dear, generous, boyish-hearted Hesketh. She had even thought of hating him!

"Hesketh," she said.

He sighed and took off his horners.

"Yes, sweetheart?"

"I'm sorry to worry you. I only wanted to say that I'm very grateful for your love. I've no brains, you know."

He laughed and came over to the bedside and put his arms round her.

"Brains, be hanged. You've quite enough for a fellow like me and a heart big enough for all of us, and beauty beyond words."

She pulled his head down and kissed him on his bald patch.

XXXIX

SHE stayed up late next evening against Hesketh's advice. She was feeling better and rather bored with going to bed early. Besides, it was Viola's birthday —nineteen!—and Guy had come over with his portrait of her as a birthday present and had hung it up in the library. He had caught Viola's untamed look, perhaps he had even exaggerated it a little, and she stood there in her white Atalanta frock, very living, with an alluring laugh. Margaret thought it wonderful, but rather unpleasant, somehow. It was as though Guy had made Viola utterly pagan, deliberately almost savagely. She wasn't quite so wild as all that.

"The Portrait of a Behaviourist!" was Viola's verdict on his work of art, and she flung her arms round Guy and kissed him before all of them very heartily and unashamed, enormously to his embarrassment.

"Ciel!" he said, with a flame of colour in his face. "Must we really do this sort of thing in public?"

"It's the way Behaviourists behave when they're pleased," laughed Viola. "They can't help themselves, and, Guy, honour bright, you've done the trick this time. That's me and no mistake about it. You've been brutal, but I put that to my own credit. It's your timidity, your shrinking from reality, your disgusting sentiment, that threatened to ruin you as an artist. Now this is the real thing, old boy. There I am, savage, beautiful, and bold. The flapper unflapped."

"Well, I'm glad you like it," said Guy trying to recover from that assault upon his shyness. "Personally I hate it. It's too violent. It's nothing but a caricature of your least attractive qualities."

Viola thought that remark extraordinarily humorous and laughed loudly.

"What do you think of it, father?"

Hesketh thought a lot of it. He was amazed at Guy's talent. He was even inclined to think it a work of genius. But it shocked him a little. He protested that it made Viola look too much like a Bacchante after drinking fermented wine in some Dionysian orgy.

"But that's what I do look like, father," said Viola. "After two glasses of bubbly."

"Ginger-beer for you in future," said Hesketh with his high-pitched laugh. "But here comes grandfather. Let us hear what rejuvenation does for art criticism."

Mr. Jerningham had put on his velvet jacket and white tie in honour of Viola's birthday. He looked almost jaunty as he came into the room, rubbing his hands. His eyes were bright and he held himself upright, and instead of the grey pallor of his parchment-like face as Margaret had first seen him, his skin was smooth and pink.

"A happy birthday, my dear!" he said to Viola, putting his arm round her waist and kissing her several times. "May you never grow older than your venerable but rejuvenated granddad. I have that twenty-five feeling. Springtime! . . . Love! . . . Roses!"

He laughed in a curiously goblin way like a character Margaret had once seen in one of Barrie's plays—"Dear Brutus," wasn't it?

"Time you learnt the Charleston," said Viola, who was in high spirits and played up to his merriment.

"Why not?" asked Mr. Jerningham blandly. "The Charleston by all means, if I can get a pretty girl to teach me."

"That's me!" cried Viola. "Fetch the gramophone, Cyril."

"Must I?" asked Cyril. "Can't we spend a quiet evening for once?"

"Not on my birthday, old boy!"

"Modern youth is born tired," said Mr. Jerningham. "I'm ashamed of you, Cyril, my lad."

"Well—"

Cyril sloped off to get the gramophone while his grandfather came and sat beside Margaret and took her hand.

"Well, my dear. I hope you're not feeling too tired. You're looking bonny."

Margaret withdrew her hand gently, and felt ashamed about that slight sense of repulsion which she had never been able to forget since Mr. Jerningham had grown young again.

He leaned towards her, chuckling humorously and whispered:

"What would you say if I got married again? The wedding of a rejuvenated gentleman! Something for the *Daily Mail,* eh?"

"Oh, no," said Margaret. "Grandfather, that's a dreadful idea."

"Why not?" he asked mirthfully. "Why not? A man's as old as he feels, and I feel twenty-five. Younger than Hesketh. . . . Why, Hesketh's growing old! Older than his own father . . . Now what would you say if I went off with our little parlour-maid? Little Lucy, and a nice baggage! A bit of a scandal in Wimbledon, what? My word, the old women would have something to talk about!"

"Hush!" said Margaret, feeling unhappy and distressed.

He laughed and patted her hand.

"I'm only joking . . . All the same, I feel incredibly young. Absurdly youthful. Like a two-year-old."

"Coming, grandfather?" cried Viola. "Here's Cyril with the gramophone."

"Coming? Of course I'm coming!"

Mr. Jerningham sprang up and did a little dance across the bare boards.

"Who said the Charleston?"

"Pretty marvellous!" said Hesketh, bending over Mar-

garet for a moment and putting his hand on her shoulder with a friendly touch. "Father gets younger every day. You must admit that, sweetheart!"

"I do admit it," said Margaret. "But I don't like it, Hesketh. It's unnatural. There's something—beastly about it. Old age is so beautiful when it comes naturally."

"No," he said. "No. Old age is decay, and pitiful. Let's put it off as long as possible. Science is going to do so. It is doing so . . . Look at father—a miracle!"

Yes, it was miraculous, in a way. Mr. Jerningham was learning the Charleston from Viola, who was laughing with shrill merriment and putting him through his paces.

"Like this, grandfather! First on the right foot, with the knee inwards, then on the left—the left!—one, two, three, four—yes, oh, excellent! Keep the rhythm! Quietly now. La-do-da-de-da-bong . . . Guy, how's this for rhythm?"

Guy leaned against the mantelpiece smiling, and amazed at Mr. Jerningham's agility. Cyril sat on a cushion below the gramophone, grinning, with a pipe between his teeth. Hesketh shouted with high-pitched mirth. It was a pleasant family scene in Wimbledon.

Presently Guy came over and sat beside Margaret rather shyly.

"Feeling all right?" he asked.

"Not too bad. Glad to have you here, Guy."

She leaned her head against his shoulder for a moment.

"I'm just a little jealous of Viola," she told him in a low voice. "Silly that, isn't it? It's because you and I belonged to each other so much."

"We do now," he answered.

"Guy," she said, "do you love her very much? Forgive me for asking. I want to know before things—happen to me. Tell me!"

"Yes," he said, laughing uneasily. "I suppose it's love all right. In fact, I'm sure it is. Head over heels."

He laughed again and looked at Viola, dancing ridiculously with her grandfather.

"Do you think you're suited to each other?" asked Margaret. She was rather pale, and had an unreasonable sense of foreboding.

"No," said Guy. "But does that make any difference? We love each other, and quarrel like tiger-cats. Very amusing and quite exciting!"

"Oh, Guy!" said Margaret. "Don't be in a hurry. It's very risky. Somehow I feel that Viola isn't your type."

For a moment she felt hot tears on her face. But she hid them from Guy and just took his hand and held it very tight.

"She's terribly amusing," said Guy. "And I'm caught all right."

It was as though he resented being "caught" but could not help himself. But that perhaps was only the mask behind which he hid his sentiment.

It was a little later than this when something happened to spoil Viola's birthday and frighten Margaret and all of them. It was Margaret who first became terror-stricken. She called out to her husband:

"Hesketh! . . . Your father—"

Mr. Jerningham had stopped dancing with Viola who was winding up the gramophone again. He stood for a few moments mopping his forehead, and then dropped his handkerchief and clutched his left side convulsively. A look of fear came into his eyes and it was then that Margaret happened to look at him. Some change was taking place in him, a kind of transfiguration. He was growing old again, very rapidly. The faint flush faded out of his face. His skin was grey again like old parchment. His eyes were dimming. He made one faltering step forward, as Margaret cried out to her husband. With his right hand he seemed to thrust back some phantom which frightened him, and spoke in a hoarse whisper.

"No!" he said. "No! . . . I'm rejuvenated . . . I'm . . ."

"Father!" cried Hesketh, making a rush at him, but not quick enough to hold him before he lurched sideways and fell crumpled up on the bare boards. Margaret was just aware of Viola's scream before she seemed to slip into a great darkness. When she became conscious again Mr. Jerningham's body had been removed from the dancing floor, and Hesketh had his arms round her, and Cyril was staring at her moodily, and Guy was very pale as though he too felt faint and ill. Viola was weeping noisily.

The rejuvenation of Mr. Jerningham had not been a success.

. . . . . .

No doubt it was this tragedy, so horrible and sudden, which was the cause of a nightmare very terrible to Margaret that night. She dreamed that Hesketh was operating on her baby, cutting out its glands, and experimenting with them. First it grew into a giant, and then dwindled into a dwarf. It was like a little monkey now—one of Hesketh's sick monkeys which made her shudder when she passed their cages. Hesketh was feeding it on thyroid extract . . . until she wakened with a shrill scream, shaking with a kind of ague.

Hesketh heard her and hurried in.

"What's the matter, sweetheart?" he cried, and held her tight. "It's quite all right. Don't get scared. Everything's perfectly all right, little wife!"

But it wasn't quite all right. That night Margaret's baby was born dead, though she didn't know until three days later, because of her weakness. It was Hesketh who told her and his face was very white and troubled. It was a great shock to him. It seemed to upset his theories of Eugenics, and his belief in the Age of Reason as a cure for all unhappiness.

XL

IT was only natural that the death of her baby on that same night as Mr. Jerningham's fatal collapse should leave Margaret with a sense of desolation. But something more than that had happened to her, she thought. She found an extreme difficulty in getting back to her own interests in life—the daily routine of small duties and amusements in this house at Wimbledon. She felt drained not only of physical strength but of all purpose, which was worse. Everything seemed so futile after that effort at creation which had ended in a little dead thing instead of the living wonder for which she had hoped. She wept secretly (hiding her tears from Hesketh) until she rebuked herself for this weakness which made things miserable for other people, when she sat quiet and depressed among them. After that she roused herself deliberately to be merry and bright and was surprised sometimes at her own gaiety, but it was play-acting at first, and for a long time there was an ache in her heart, and that sense of emptiness as though her spirit had died as well as her baby.

Everyone was enormously kind, and she had been touched by their sympathy. Viola and Cyril had not said very much beyond "Bad luck, old girl!" but in a thousand little ways they had tried to cheer her up and get her laughing again, so that she was grateful to them. Betty Winter had rushed over when she could spare the time from her hospital job, and had talked the philosophy of Stoicism with her usual mixture of wit and wisdom, but without any satisfactory answer to Margaret's plaintive questioning as to the reason why life should be so difficult and what was the good of it all anyhow?

"You see, Betty," she argued, "it's no good pretending that we can be happy by using our common sense and facing up to things in an intellectual way, without funk, or superstition, or Freudian complexes, or Early Victorian sloppiness and all that stuff we used to talk about at Somerville. Common sense won't bring my little baby to life."

"True," said Betty. "But one has to cut one's losses. It's no use brooding, my dear. Life still calls to you and has lots of fun ahead. Cheer up, lady Margaret!"

She found it hard to cheer up, though she tried to do so when Guy came and said, "Bad luck, old girl!" just like Cyril and Viola and watched her rather anxiously now and then, and made sketches of her as she lay back in a cane chair, propped up by pillows.

Then her father and mother came over and worried her a little, although they meant to be very loving and kind. Her mother talked most of the time about the Second Phase of Tribulation which was going to overwhelm the world in the following May according to the prophecies discovered in the Great Pyramid, and she was obviously looking forward enjoyably to an orgy of horrible happenings from which the "Brits" would emerge triumphantly as the dictators of a new era of civilisation.

"My dearest dear," said Mrs. Allport, "perhaps it's a good thing that God did not give the breath of life to your poor little baby. We shall have to endure many agonies, no doubt, before the prophecies are fulfilled!"

Margaret laughed rather weakly.

"I must say you're not very cheerful, mother. Haven't you any better news than that? And if God has anything to do with it, why doesn't He stop all this misery in the world?"

"Not even God can stop the wickedness of men," said Mrs. Allport. "Those dreadful Russians, my dear—the Beast of the Prophecies!"

Margaret's father smiled impatiently at his wife's gloomy

utterances, and gave a slight reassuring wink at Margaret over Mrs. Allport's head as though to say, "Rubbish! Don't let it worry you, my dear." He lingered behind when Viola took Margaret's mother to see the garden and chatted about the weather, and the way the Bishops were slanging each other in public about science and religion (he had no patience with the ritualists) and the latest scandals connected with his congregation. That pretty woman Mrs. Maxwell was suing for a divorce. Her husband actually knocked her about, although he had always seemed a very decent fellow. Lady Winifred Smee had lost a lot of money gambling at Monte Carlo, the silly woman. She had sold her house in Lowndes Square. That Featherfew girl—the one with the Alsatians—had run off with a Russian dancer—"a lounge lizard" as Guy called him. The more he saw of the younger generation the more he wondered if they were on the right track. They took such tremendous risks . . .

"Father," said Margaret, "I've just been reading your sermon yesterday. It's reported in *The Times,* this morning."

"Inadequately, as usual," he said, with a touch of annoyance. "They left out a good deal, confound them."

"It makes you deny Christ's miracles," said Margaret. "And all the miraculous side of Christianity. Isn't it rather dangerous to say things like that?"

He smiled and raised his eyebrows.

"Dangerous?"

"Well," said Margaret, "it doesn't seem to be very orthodox, does it?"

Canon Allport smiled again and shrugged his square shoulders.

"There's no such thing as orthodoxy nowadays, thank goodness. I shan't be burnt at the stake."

"But, father," said Margaret, "if there were no miracles then one can't believe in Christianity."

"Good heavens, yes!" he protested with a laugh. "Surely, my dear, you don't think that the truth of Christianity depends upon a superstitious belief in miraculous happenings? It's all a question of definition. I don't deny Our Lord's healing power. I only say that what we call miracles were the manifestations of perfectly natural laws—now known as auto-suggestion, psycho-analysis and the influence of mind over body. 'Faith-healing' in the strict and scientific sense of the word. What I'm aiming at is to make faith easy and acceptable to modern intelligence. I agree with old Barnes, only I wish he wouldn't be quite so aggressive about it."

"Well, it's all very bewildering," said Margaret. "Sometimes I feel desperately in need of religion, father. But if nobody believes anything it doesn't seem much good, does it?"

Canon Allport was amused by this sweeping agnosticism and raised his hands, his rather plump well-shaped hands, in humorous protest.

"My dear child! There are so many things to believe without being superstitious. Let's hold on to our faith in the Great Design behind evolutionary progress—in the beauty and glory of Life—in the Christian revelation of spiritual love and charity."

"No!" said Margaret. "That's not good enough, father. It's much too abstract and uncertain . . . It doesn't comfort me for losing my little baby."

She broke down and wept for a few minutes and her father stooped over her and kissed her forehead.

"I know!" he said. "I know! It's hard to reconcile our private griefs—our little personal tragedies—our agonies of doubt and despair—with that Great Design which we call God, in all humility. The individual seems to count for so little, and nature is so ruthless and so very cruel . . . Still, we must try to suffer these things patiently—with courage and resignation. That's the hardest thing to learn—resignation. . . . Oh, Lord, oh, Lord!"

He spoke as though he were trying to learn that lesson and not finding it easy, and Margaret wondered afterwards to what things he had to resign himself. Perhaps to her mother's eccentricities—that little mother of hers must worry him sometimes!—and to the advance of old age, or, at least, to the fifty feeling which meant perhaps a painful readjustment, and a giving up of dreams. She was beginning to understand that life did not provide much peace at any age. Mr. Jerningham had wanted youth back again. He had never been reconciled to old age or the thought of death. Her father must fret sometimes because he was tied down to a narrow life with a lot of old ladies in Belgravia. Being comfortable wasn't enough for a man of his active mind and love of adventure. Anyhow, his idea of God didn't help her at all. His Great Design was no better, as far as she was concerned, than Hesketh's Age of Reason. They were both very cold and cheerless in times of trouble.

"Well, father," she said at the end of this conversation, "it's awfully sweet of you to come over and see me. I'll try not to be so low-spirited next time. I don't want to inflict my gloom on all you dear people."

"You must do some theatres," he said. "A good musical comedy is a fine tonic, I find. Lots of pretty girls and no high-brow stuff!"

"Oh, father, you Philistine!"

He laughed good-humouredly.

"At my age I know as much about tragedy as I want to. I can't bear all this morbid stuff they put on the stage nowadays. Too harrowing and rather shocking. I saw "The Fanatics" the other day—and blushed in the stalls, between two young women who didn't turn a hair. Are young people as naughty as all that?"

He kissed her on the forehead again and said, "There's your mother fussing about in the hall," and turned to smile at her before leaving the room. Her dear father, so handsome, so bland, so kind-hearted, and so very useless to her as

a spiritual comforter! And yet perhaps his advice was best. There was always a musical comedy, to make one forget! She would get Guy to take her. Or Cyril and Viola. She wondered when Audley would come to see her again. He had written a nice letter to her saying how sorry he was. "Frightful bad luck," he said.

XLI

HESKETH had been very pitiful in her tribulation, until he became absorbed again in his work and so cheerful at meal-times that she could not help feeling hurt because he had forgotten her tragedy so quickly, as though the death of her baby did not matter in the main scheme of evolutionary progress, nor his father's death make much difference—after the first shock and sadness—to his experiments and belief in the scientific control of human development.

She found herself adopting an ironical attitude towards Hesketh and his science. Sometimes she hated herself for the sharp things she said—the silly smart little things—which startled him and made him lift his eyebrows and look at her wonderingly, or even hurt him so that he coloured up and laughed uneasily. It was a kind of bitterness against his biology, and against his whole philosophy of life as though it had let her down, or broken something in her heart, or taken the beauty out of life. Of course, really, it was just her overwhelming disappointment and her physical lassitude; and those ironical remarks of hers—utterly foolish most of them—were just emotional reactions of self-pity. Or perhaps she found that it was better for her to look at life humorously and not take things too seriously—not even Hesketh or science, lest she should go on weeping for her dead baby. Still, it was hard on Hesketh when she jeered at almost everything he said in a serious scientific way.

She teased him by calling him "Professor," and answering "yes, sir," to any dogmatic statement, and she smiled, perhaps a little too scornfully, when he talked about Eugenics and Birth Control, as though the death of her baby had

made all that sort of thing seem very ridiculous to her. And she once challenged him at the breakfast-table when he made some allusion to his faith in the coming of an Age of Reason.

"Hesketh, how absurd you are, really!"

He put down *The Times* and smiled at her good-naturedly.

"In what way, sweetheart?"

"You despise people who believe in religion," she said, "but you believe something far more mythical. I can't see any evidence at all about the progress of Reason. Have you read the *Daily Express* this morning?"

He started back and blinked humorously as though she had hit him between the eyes, and Cyril at the other end of the table grinned and said, "That's a good 'un!"

"The whole world seems mad," said Margaret. "Civil War in China—the United States going in for a big Navy—Europe quarrelling like cats and dogs—Bishops slanging each other about the Prayer Book—nobody doing anything about the coal mines with a million men out of work—and yet you believe in an Age of Reason! It seems foolish to me . . . But then, of course, I'm quite brainless."

Nerves, of course. A little emotional storm to ease that ache in her heart—but hard on Hesketh, and very silly.

"Not at all brainless, dear heart," said Hesketh. "Only impatient. It has taken a million years or more to attain our present state of reason. Poor going, I admit! But perhaps we're putting on speed. In another five centuries or so—"

"I'm afraid I can't wait as long as that," she said laughing, but she was aware of a little note of irritation in that laughter, and Hesketh was aware of it. After breakfast she leaned her head against his shoulder and said, "Sorry! . . . Just nerves."

But it happened again and still again—a sharpness of tongue when he talked of science, a habit of saying "Bother biology!" when he said "Biologically speaking,"—a sicken-

ing pity for those poor monkeys in the garden upon which he was always experimenting in order to find out the working of the ductless glands and other secrets of life—which hadn't succeeded in the case of Mr. Jerningham. It was as though she had a personal grudge against his science—as though it stood somehow between her and happiness.

XLII

THE idea came into her head one day that Richard Halliday who had once been her father's curate might be of help to her, and she took the train from Wimbledon one afternoon with a sense of adventure as though somewhere in Fulham she might find the secret of that happiness which she felt missing from her life just now. The idea had come to her quite suddenly, as though she had received some call from him in a telepathic way. It was just when she was going for a walk on the Common with Viola, who stood at the front door with that amiable mongrel Voronoff.

"Coming, Margaret?" cried Viola.

Margaret was dabbing her face with powder to hide the trace of tears. She had been crying for no earthly reason—sheer weakness—and then suddenly that thought of Mr. Halliday came to her, with an urgent call. "I believe he could help me," she thought, and she had a yearning to talk to that man who believed in the things she had once believed.

She went downstairs and spoke to Viola.

"Do you mind if I don't come for that walk? I think I shall go up to Town and see a friend."

"Audley?" asked Viola, innocently, or at least without any sign of guile. There was no reason why Margaret's cheeks should burn suddenly at that simple question. She had only seen Audley once since her baby's death, when he had driven over to Wimbledon to enquire about her health. But she was aware of that silly blush and turned her head to hide it from Viola.

"Not Audley," she said. "And I shall be home for supper."

Viola would not be home for supper. She was doing a show in Town with Guy.

"Again?" asked Margaret.

"Why not? . . . Any objection, dear lady?"

No, Margaret had no objection which she could put into words. The house had been dull because of her illness and it was nice for Viola to go out in the evenings now and then—and only natural that she should like to go with Guy. There was no harm in it beyond late hours which couldn't be good for Guy's health. The other day Viola had arrived home at three o'clock in the morning after dancing at some place with Guy and other friends, while Margaret had lain awake wondering why she was so late and worrying about her brother, because he was so restless and moody now, and still so attracted by this girl who tried to tease the life out of him. It was foolish to worry. Perhaps it was no more than boy-and-girl nonsense between them which would end in a quarrel or a burst of laughter. They both had a sense of humour which would save them from what Viola called "gut reactions" in the language of Behaviourism.

So Margaret thought on the way up to Town in a third-class carriage which reeked of stale cigarette smoke where she sat with a nagging headache. She was more worried about herself really. She had had another little scene with Hesketh that morning over breakfast. He had said something about "religious humbug" with reference to something in the morning paper—some letter about the revision of the English Prayer Book—and she had laughed rather bitterly and made a foolish remark about "scientific intolerance," hating herself when she saw the mild rebuke in his eyes. She was all wrong, somehow. She would have to pull herself together. She would have to build up some new faith in life which had been broken for a time by the terrible disappointment of her baby's death, and by some inability to accept Hesketh's idea of life. Some people could do without religion, just going on from day to day

without bothering. But if she didn't get some kind of faith she might go wrong altogether. Once or twice lately she had been frightened by herself. She had found herself dreaming about Audley Instone and thinking of him too much in waking hours when she was lonely. His good-looking face blotted out the book she was reading. She caught herself wondering if she would have been happier with him if she hadn't married Hesketh. Once she had been utterly shocked by a kind of daydream in which he had his arms about her and kissed her with passion . . . until she started with horror at having even imagined such treachery to Hesketh, and such secret abominable things.

Perhaps women without any kind of religion felt tempted like that and let themselves slip into dreadful wickedness, or pretended that it wasn't wicked but just natural and inevitable. Hesketh had told her once that she was as free as air if ever she preferred some younger man. He honestly believed that as part of his philosophy founded on Reason, but she was perfectly certain that as far as she was concerned she would be tortured to death if she were ever weak enough to yield to such temptations. And yet without any faith some frightful impulses might come to her one day, when Hesketh was getting older, or when loneliness became intolerable, or when passion stirred in her. Human nature was horrible like that. How could people control it, unless they had some supernatural law in their minds, some tremendous reason for duty and sacrifice of self? That was where Hesketh's ideas seemed to break down. She might be tempted beyond her strength to go to Audley one day. She liked his shyness, and his charming manner, and he was young, and would still be young when Hesketh was old. What was going to keep her back in that hour of tremendous temptation if she had no faith in anything but Hesketh's science? Loyalty, people might say. But Hesketh gave her liberty. He would not insist on loyalty. He would say, "Hop off, my dear. That was our bargain." And yet

she would be a lost soul, if ever that happened, self-tortured by that broken faith of hers.

"Women need religion," she said out loud in that third-class smoker and was startled by her own voice, and then wondered if men were different. Hesketh didn't need religion, or at least had made one of his own without any supernatural sanction which seemed to satisfy him perfectly, with a code of courage and truth and honour which he obeyed instinctively. Perhaps he would be angry if he knew that she was going to see a clergyman with a desperate idea that he might help her back to some kind of faith in that "anthropomorphic God" which Hesketh jeered at so much. At least, she supposed that was why she was going to Fulham with a sense of spiritual adventure . . .

She found where he lived by asking at a greengrocer's shop near an ugly little church in a slum street called Linnets' Grove. He had talked about Linnets' Grove that day in the Green Park, and thought Christ would be more at home there than in Belgravia, though the squalor of it depressed her so much that she had half a mind to turn back. If Christianity had produced a civilisation like this it didn't say much for religion. Hesketh's Age of Reason would make a better job of it. But perhaps it was the failure of living up to Christian ideas which was the cause of such a place. How hideous they were, these rows of stucco houses with dark basements down area steps! The paint had worn off the doors years ago and the plaster had peeled from the walls and those ugly round pillars on each side of the steps. The windows hadn't been cleaned for years and their curtains were dirty and torn without a pretence of hiding the dire poverty of the rooms inside, though cards propped up in front advertised bed-sitting-rooms for Single Gentlemen. Here and there a door opened and a slatternly woman stretched out an arm for the afternoon milk which had just been delivered, and shooed away lean cats slinking round the railings. Down the street came an old woman leading

a blind man and singing "Scenes that are Brightest" in a shrill quavery voice which pierced Margaret's ears with infinite melancholy. One of the windows opened and a hunchbacked girl with skinny arms threw out two coppers, stopping that awful song for a moment while the old woman stopped to pick them up. At the corner of the street a group of young men with scarves round their necks were studying the betting news in the evening paper, and Margaret heard one of them using foul words as she passed while the others laughed huskily. From number 31 a girl with a dead-white face and painted lips came out and stood on the steps shrieking out to someone in the little hall behind her, a yellow-haired woman in a pink dressing-gown.

"Oh, chuck it, mother! I've had enough lip from you to-day, I tell you straight. I'm going to do what I damn well like, so there."

"I'll tell your father," cried the woman, coming on to the step and taking a milk can off the spiked railings. "If he knows as much as I do he'd tear the clothes off yer back, you dirty little devil."

"Well, who learnt me?" said the girl with a shrill laugh which was quite mirthless. "Who learnt me, I'd like to know? A nice one to talk you are, ain't you, with yer yeller 'air and yer gentlemen friends. Oh, Gord! I'll say you are."

The door with its scabby paint was slammed by the lady in the pink dressing-gown, and the girl shrugged her thin shoulders and came down the steps in a very short frock which showed her knees and a hole in the stocking of her right leg. One of the birds in Linnets' Grove, escaping from her cage, perhaps.

In the greengrocer's shop Margaret asked for directions from a young woman holding a bald-headed baby in one arm while she weighed out some Brussels sprouts.

"Can you tell me where Mr. Halliday lives?"

The young woman looked up and smiled rather pleasantly, Margaret thought.

"I ought to know, seeing that, well—never mind that! Number 32, miss. Ground floor. You can't mistake it."

"Thank you," said Margaret, and was leaving the shop when the young woman spoke again, with a nervous laugh.

"If you're seeing 'im you might tell 'im I 'aven't forgotten what 'e did for me. Middock is my name, Peg, to my friends. 'E'll know."

"Has he been kind to you?" asked Margaret.

The young woman looked at her suspiciously for a moment and then flushed deeply and laughed again.

"Well, 'e meant to be kind. Saved me from drowning myself, if you'd like to know. When this brat was born."

Margaret looked down at the baby for a moment and touched its plump little cheek with her finger. She hadn't had such luck as this girl. Her own little "brat" had been born dead.

"What a jolly little baby!" she said. "How happy you must be."

"Oh, I dunno," said the girl. "Might have been better the other way . . . It was Mr. 'Alliday what talked me out of it, just as I was off to Chelsea Bridge with this Mr. Impudence who wasn't wanted just then."

She held the baby closer to her and gave it a furtive kiss.

"No daddy to call its own," she explained, looking over her shoulder at the back of the shop as though afraid of being overheard. "You know what I mean, miss. It's no catch when a young girl in service finds she's going to 'ave a baby unexpected like. If it hadn't been for Mr. 'Alliday —still, I'm not the only one. 'E spends 'is time looking after those that get in trouble one way and another. Gives all 'is money away—mostly to bad eggs, I'd say—and starves 'isself 'alf the time. There's no sense in it, seems to me."

Margaret smiled at this scepticism on the subject of good works.

"It's his religion," she said. "He finds something better than sense in it, perhaps."

"I wasn't brought up religious, myself," said the girl. "Still, I sometimes go round to Mr. 'Alliday's church and scrub the floor down for 'im. 'E says God will pay me back for it one day—I don't think!—and if it pleases 'im it pleases me. I'd 'ave been drowned all right—with this little brat—if it 'adn't been for 'im."

She laughed as though she saw some frightful irony in this thought and kissed her baby again.

"Number 32," she said. "You can't mistake it."

Margaret didn't mistake it, and a thin-faced woman with grey hair opened the door of number 32 and nodded when she asked for Mr. Halliday.

"Yes, he's in, for a wonder . . . Mr. 'Alliday, a lidy to see you! . . . Mr. 'Alliday!"

Richard came out and did not look surprised to see Margaret there. His thin black figure stood in the narrow passage under a gas-jet and his hatchet face was touched by the flickering light which cast deep shadows under his eyes, making him look ill.

"Hullo!" he said. "I had an idea you would come this afternoon. I waited in for you. Come and have some tea."

He led her into his sitting-room, which was very barely furnished in a lodging-house style, except for a lot of books on the shelves and a few etchings on the walls, and some photographs, mostly of young officers, on the mantelpiece and desk.

"My sanctuary," he said. "I feel a bit of a humbug in a luxurious place like this when lots of families down this street are crowded like sardines in a tin. That chair is quite comfortable. Won't you take off your fur?"

He was just a little nervous, she thought, because of her visit, although he had expected her.

"What made you think I was coming?" she asked.

He laughed and hesitated for a moment before he answered.

"Some people would call it a hunch. I suppose it's telepathy or something of the sort. I was 'aware' of you, so to speak. I had an idea you weren't quite happy. I hope I was dead wrong."

"You were dead right," she told him. "Since I last saw you I've had a baby and it died."

She tried to keep the quiver out of her voice and the tears back from her eyes.

"Hard luck!" he said quietly.

She smiled at those words. Cyril and Viola had said "Hard luck!" Audley had said "Hard luck!" Betty Winter had said "Hard luck, old girl!"

"And since then," she said, "I've been a great nuisance to my family and friends, because I'm always sorry for myself. . . . Self-pity—isn't that morbid?"

"Not easy to avoid," he admitted. "I used to be tremendously sorry for myself too until I came here. Now I'm more sorry for other people. They have a much rougher time. It brings back one's sense of proportion. If I pitied myself now I should be a dirty dog—living in the lap of luxury . . . By the by, I ordered muffins for tea in your honour. I hope you like them."

"You seem to have been very certain I was coming," she exclaimed, laughing at him.

"Not a doubt about it," he assured her.

Now that she sat in his room she felt that it was very difficult to "talk religion" with him, almost impossible to tell him her troubles like a Catholic in a confessional. And while they were having tea he didn't say a word about religion, but asked about Guy and her father and mother and other friends they had known together. She told him about "Peg," that girl in the greengrocer's shop, and delivered her message and saw his eyes light up with pleasure.

"Yes," he said, "she was in a bad way when I first met her, poor kid. Fed up with life!"

Time was slipping away and presently she would have to go back to Wimbledon, and nothing whatever would have happened except the pleasure of seeing him again. It was a chance question of his, spoken lightly, that gave her an opportunity of saying something that was in her mind.

"How's science—and your distinguished husband?"

"I've a grudge against science," she told him, "and I'm worrying my husband. What am I to do about it . . . ? You see, I'm lost between two worlds. I've lost my faith in God and I can't understand science. I mean, it doesn't give me what I want, which is a belief in something outside myself—outside everything—and some purpose in life. Courage—and hope. Do you understand what I mean? I explain myself so badly and it all seems so silly for a woman like me—hardly more than a girl, even now. Hesketh would be ashamed of me if he heard me talking like this. Mrs. Hesketh Jerningham! . . . It sounds like treachery."

"Good Lord, no!" said Richard Halliday. "We're all worrying about the same kind of thing. I dare say he does really. That's why he's so keen on science. It seems to explain things. I dare say he's almost desperately keen to make it explain everything."

"What does it explain?" asked Margaret. "It seems to do away with God anyhow. Hesketh thinks so."

"I can't believe that," said Richard Halliday, smiling at her. "He only thinks it does away with crude ideas about God. Not that I know the first thing about science. But it doesn't bother me at all. Religion will be dead and damned—and deserved to be—if ever it goes against knowledge and facts. But as far as I can make out from one or two scientists I happen to know—rather big fellows in their own line—the more they know the less they know. There are always mysteries behind, and worlds of mysteries behind those mysteries. They're finding out how things work, but

not what makes them work. They know a lot about the chemistry of life, but nothing about life itself. And they know a good deal about the mechanism of the mind, but nothing much about the quality of thought. Mental telepathy sounds nice and scientific. But how did I know you were coming this afternoon?"

"Vibrations," said Margaret.

Richard Halliday laughed, and said, "Jolly good word! But does it explain anything?"

Margaret was silent for a few moments, thinking hard of all the things she wanted to say and unable to express herself.

"Hesketh denies anything supernatural," she said feebly. "That knocks out everything, doesn't it?"

Curiously enough he didn't seem to think so. He had an idea, he said, that there was no distinction between natural and supernatural. Nature was the greatest miracle of all, as far as he could make out. Everything seemed transcendental to him. Even Linnets' Grove seemed nothing but pure spirit when he walked down it, and its plague-stricken houses were as unreal to him, or as real, as the heavenly mansions of eternity, or a sunset over the Mediterranean, or a poem by Evelyn Underhill. Peg Middock and her illegitimate baby were as real, or as unreal, as Cleopatra, or Queen Elizabeth, or the twilight that crept up Linnets' Grove before the lamps were lit. He found it hard to explain, but what he was driving at was a sort of conviction he had that everything and everybody belonged to a spiritual life which was the only reality, not dependent on time or space, or any limitations.

"All that's much too difficult for me," said Margaret.

"Oh, I don't pretend to understand it or explain it," he answered. "But I honestly believe that one can get a glimpse now and then of the spirit world which seems outside ourselves but to which really we belong. There's nothing supernatural about it. It's natural in a way. This life and the

next may be the same. Before may be the same as afterwards. I can't help feeling that time is just a convenient expression, and that our minds can slip outside it. One is aware sometimes of—well—funny things."

He laughed and thrust his thin hands through his hair, and looked at Margaret as though wondering whether he dared tell her things which she might think foolish.

"What sort of things?" she asked.

He went over to the mantelpiece and took down the photograph of a boy in uniform.

"See this kid?" he asked. "Nice looking, isn't he? He was killed on the Somme, in '16. I was in the same battalion with him, and we used to yarn a lot. The night he was killed I was home on leave; but he came into my room just as I was going to bed. At least I was aware of him, so distinctly that I said, 'Hullo, old man, how on earth did you get here?' It wasn't a ghost, in the ordinary sense of the word. I don't believe in ghosts. It was my spirit and his spirit in touch with each other."

"Queer!" said Margaret.

She felt rather uneasy and glanced at Richard Halliday wondering if he were quite normal. Perhaps he saw the suspicion in her mind for he laughed good-naturedly.

"Oh, I don't believe in table-turning and all that. Don't be afraid! Only I do believe that science will have to admit a spiritual reality beyond chemical analysis . . . We can't afford to quarrel with science. But science mustn't go beyond the things it knows."

"I wish you would talk to Hesketh one day," said Margaret wistfully.

"Oh, Lord!" he laughed. "Not in these trousers, as the Tommies used to say."

Well, that was all the talk she had with him apart from trivial conversation that day in his barely furnished room. Time was up and she had to get back to Wimbledon. He hadn't told her very much except about that boy on the

mantelpiece—if that was true, then one could be sure of life beyond the grave—and she hadn't poured out her woes to him, but all the same she felt comforted. It was his simplicity and unselfishness and his devotion to the people in his slum parish which seemed to make her own self-pity so silly and contemptible.

He walked with her along the Fulham Road to Sloane Square Station and on the way he talked a little about his "job."

"One comes up against all sorts of scallywags," he told her. "Professional beggars—fellows who are on the dole and won't get off it to do a bit of honest work—crooks, and degenerates who almost seem beyond reform, poor devils. One gets a bit discouraged, sometimes."

He sighed rather deeply and then seemed to see a brighter side of things.

"Still, on the whole they're as good as gold. There's more Christianity down Linnets' Grove than you'd expect to find in Mayfair. I should be sorry to leave them."

Margaret seemed to feel a hidden significance in the tone of those last words.

"Do you think of leaving them?" she asked, rather startled.

"Oh, not yet," he assured her. "But I might move on one day . . . One's mind moves on . . . I'm still groping like a blind man in a dark wood."

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "I thought you were so certain of everything. I came to you for certainty—faith without doubt. I shall feel—let down—if you go adrift."

"I'd hate to let you down," he said quietly. "But I can't pretend to faith without doubt. Faith, yes, but not certainty about my present job. I'm rather tempted—well, tempted is hardly the word!—to apply for another situation, elsewhere, if I can muster up the courage to make the change."

He laughed as though at some secret joke—or some tremendous spiritual adventure which called to him.

At Sloane Square Station she put her hand on his sleeve.

"Don't leave Linnets' Grove!" she pleaded. "I like to feel you're there. I would like to take on Peg's job and scrub out your church now and then."

"If I move on I'll tell you," he answered. "And if you feel like a day's scrubbing, we'll go down on our knees together! It's as good a prayer as I can imagine. *Laborare est orare*—in the right spirit. And awfully good exercise, anyhow."

She turned and gave him her hand. A crowd poured into the station on either side of them—shop girls from Harrods going home after their day's work, little milliners from the hat shops down Beauchamp Place, the pretty ministers of luxury and fashion in short frocks and long stockings.

"Pray for me," said Margaret.

She noticed again how shabby he looked in the glare of light and how thin and worn, with some inward conflict of spirit, some flame that burnt him. He smiled at her and raised two fingers with a kind of blessing like a Catholic priest she had seen in Italy. Somehow, without saying much —what had he said?—she went home with a sense of comfort and more courage. He believed in the spirit, anyhow, whatever his doubts. He was all spirit and "aware" of a spiritual life about him. Once—in the catacombs—she had had that sense of "awareness" in a queer uncanny way. Hesketh had said it was purely physical, but she had never believed that.

XLIII

PROFESSOR HESKETH JERNINGHAM shocked many simple souls by his address at the British Association which he had been preparing so long. But it was a personal triumph in the Albert Hall, where there was a very large audience of scientists, school-teachers, clergy, and that intelligent public which is thrilled by the latest sensations of science, as they are paragraphed in the daily Press, including those remarkable old ladies who attend lectures at the British Institution and other learned societies with a religious devotion to knowledge which they do not understand.

Margaret was proud of her husband that night when he came on the platform, looking very nervous as he took his place at the reading-desk and fiddled about with a button on his waistcoat while he was being introduced by the President. Margaret was nervous because he was nervous. She had had an anxious time getting him into his evening clothes, and even now, after all her care, his white tie had slipped over the back stud and was working up towards his ears. Both Cyril and Viola had had to render first-aid to get him ready in time, and he had had a nerve storm, using most unprofessorial language, when he lost one of his gold links, discovered under the bed by Cyril who had crawled heroically in search of it. A little scene in the private life of a great man, unknown to the public who had come to hear him with reverence! But there he was at last, with slightly disordered hair, surrounded by fellow-scientists who clapped him when he came on to the platform and pulled their beards thoughtfully when he began his address. The beard, as Margaret noticed, has found its last adherents in the realm of

science, and she almost blushed to think that it was not very long since she had played the game of "Beaver"—very popular at Oxford—with suppressed giggles at the encounter of hairy old gentlemen. Now she was the wife of Hesketh Jerningham who stood surrounded by face fungus belonging to distinguished men. Just before he began his address he looked towards her box and smiled.

She sat there with Cyril and Viola and her brother Guy, and Audley Instone. They had all dined together at a restaurant in Sloane Square before the meeting, and Viola, as usual, had talked too loudly and laughed too much, but had kept everybody amused—except, perhaps, Guy, who was rather quiet and moody. Hesketh had dined at the Reform Club with a Fellow of the Royal Society, after that desperate struggle in his bedroom. Somewhere in the audience, perhaps, was Richard Halliday, to whom Margaret had sent a ticket. She looked about for him, but he was lost in that great hall. Her father and mother were in a neighbouring box with the Bishop of Belgravia, and by leaning a little forward Margaret could smile at her father, looking very handsome and dignified and, she thought, just a little bored. He raised his hand to her once—his white, well-shaped hand—and answered her smile.

Cyril recognised some of the notorieties.

"There's old Bernard Shaw, looking like the great god Pan disguised as a Christian gentleman."

He also pointed out Sir Oliver Lodge with his domed head—"looking wiser than any man could possibly be," said Viola—and other great men of science and letters.

There was a little mist in the hall through which innumerable lights twinkled. Before Hesketh appeared they could hear the murmur of the audience all talking together, with the noise of waves breaking on distant rocks, and the rustle of papers like leaves stirred by a strong wind. Up in the galleries little bunches of human heads peered down between gaps of loneliness. Below in the stalls the majority

of heads were bald and glimmered under the lights. There were gusts of coughing above the subdued roar of conversation, and once a sneeze cut through all other sounds like the tearing of a sheet. Then silence settled down as Hesketh appeared and the President rose and raised his hands.

"Father's tie is like a dish-clout!" said Viola.

"They didn't come to see his tie," growled Cyril.

Audley Instone drew his chair nearer to Margaret.

"I shan't understand a word," he whispered. "This is right off my beat. Perhaps you'll give me a clue now and then?"

"Personally," said Guy, "I'm not interested in science. It doesn't seem to mean anything, except to plumbers and wireless experts."

That was for Viola, who said, "I'll talk to you afterwards, little boy."

"Hush!" whispered Margaret.

She was intensely nervous, as all wives are with all husbands when they speak in public. But she was proud too. This was her man whom the world had come to hear—so many people of intelligence outside as well as inside this hall who would be listening to the broadcasting of Hesketh's speech. She knew his weaknesses as well as his strength, his absent-minded absurdities as well as his knowledge. She had hurt him sometimes by her schoolgirl impudence, her little brainless quips. She disagreed with him—as though she had the right to disagree! Sometimes she hated his science because it seemed to stand between her and happiness—her selfish desire for some impossible romantic happiness. But to-night she felt humble when she saw him standing there to give an account of his life's work, and state his philosophy—the result of all that hard work which she resented so often because it made her lonely. She wished she could go on to that platform and put his tie straight . . .

Then he began his address. It was all rather difficult, but she could get the drift of it when she paid attention. But

sometimes her attention wandered, and she thought of all sorts of silly things, and missed a lot of what Hesketh was saying. He was saying something about the evolution of man . . . his descent from primitive forms . . . his undoubted relationship with the simian stock . . . blood tests . . . embryonic proofs . . . skull measurements . . . the fœtus of the human species . . . the convolutions of the brain . . . the Neanderthal man . . . the Cro-Magnon type . . . palæolithic civilisation . . . the development of experience and the inheritance of knowledge by tradition . . . the discovery and control of physical powers.

"It is curious and distressing," said Hesketh, "that man, so masterful over the powers of nature, has not exhibited any evolutionary force within himself since his early history was known. Neither physically nor morally has he shown much development. In industrial communities he has actually degenerated, and even in actual brain power he is not in advance of his ancestors. The Cro-Magnon man, living his cave life in the early Stone Age, averaged six feet three, with one-sixth more brain than the modern European. His senses of sight, hearing, and smell were more acutely developed. Without going back as far as that, we must acknowledge humbly that the men of primitive civilisations, like the Greeks at their best period, had intellectual qualities which compare favourably with our own."

Margaret lost the thread of Hesketh's address for a few minutes. She was wondering whether Richard Halliday had come and whether, perhaps, in that misty hall with its haze of light, he was aware of spiritual presences about him . . . She also wondered if Audley were interested in what Hesketh was saying. He was sitting to the left of her, a little forward, with his elbow on the edge of the box and his chin in the cup of his hand. She could see his profile, clear-cut. He had a perfectly straight nose and a short upper lip. He was better looking than Cyril and stronger looking than Guy,

but it was the face of an athlete rather than of an intellectual. Half the men who rowed for Oxford or Cambridge looked like Audley. It was the English type, with that reserve and shyness which seemed to be inherited or traditional. Perhaps the best type in the world really, although Hesketh thought it stupid . . . What was Hesketh saying? For some time he had been talking about the development of mechanical energy replacing human labour and the harnessing of power.

"It raises the whole question of what men and women are going to do with these new powers which have come, and are coming, to them through the daring search of science. It is the weak link in all this chain of material development. The conditions of life are altering at a great pace. Mankind is being endowed with terrific instruments. The scientists are in chase of the very origins of energy. But man remains with all his frailties about him, neither rising in intelligence nor developing any new moral sense which will secure him from the evil use of those powers. If his standard of intelligence is not raised in proportion to the powers that are in his grasp there will be a crash of civilisation—in comparison with which the last Great War was but an affair of outposts, or a family squabble. Somehow or other, and that quickly, mankind must speed up its own evolution and take control of its own destiny."

Hesketh paused to drink a glass of water, and Margaret marvelled at his courage before that great audience. There was a movement of many people shifting in their seats. Someone in the topmost gallery dropped a paper and it came fluttering down like a big white moth until it alighted on one of the bald heads.

"Great stuff!" said Audley Instone, turning to Margaret with a smile. "Quite beyond my depths."

"Too elementary," said Cyril in a low voice. "He's playing to the gallery."

"I seem to have heard some of this before," said Viola blandly. "Still, it's good for the populace . . . What about the ductless glands?"

Hesketh was some time getting to the ductless glands. He talked about the mechanism of the mind, the structure of the nervous system, the effect of "physical disharmonies" upon thought and character, the influence of the mind on the body and the body on the mind. It was all rather technical and difficult. Margaret's thoughts wandered again, until she heard Hesketh mention religion. What was he saying about religion?

"One cannot underestimate the value of religious emotion in primitive society. Its work of auto-suggestion dominated the human mind and sublimated its instincts. Its code of social hygiene did much to check disease. Its moral censorship forbade vices and excesses which tend to destroy the individual or the race. It imposed laws under the pretext of divine authority and coerced the primitive mind of man into certain habits of virtue by fear of punishment or hope of reward in some future life. Nevertheless, for good or evil—as I frankly think for good—modern science is replacing religion in the world to-day by showing that all the phenomena supposed to be due to supernatural powers, divine intervention, and other magical manifestations, are but the working of natural laws as revealed by chemists, physicists, biologists and a new understanding of mental processes."

Margaret was aware that Audley Instone had fallen asleep. At least he had drooped a little, and presently he gave a start and looked surprised at his surroundings.

"The old religions founded upon myth and magic," said Hesketh, "are losing their hold upon the human mind. It is not too much to say that their survival is the heaviest drag upon the progress of human evolution. Religion—at least the bigotry of religion—stands definitely in the way of science by opposing the use of reason applied to such subjects as Birth Control and the liberation of the mind from

traditional fears, taboos, and inhibitions . . . It is the task of science to substitute the Age of Reason for the Age of Magic. We must replace mythical religion by religion without revelation, and develop the physical and mental powers of the human race by gaining knowledge of the chemical processes which direct human character and growth."

"The ductless glands!" said Viola, turning to wink at Guy.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Hesketh, rather solemnly, "we are rapidly acquiring knowledge which may stimulate the rate of progress in human evolution after thousands—perhaps millions of years—in which mankind has remained without much change. Recent research leads us to hope, without exaggerated optimism, that before very long we may alter the physical characteristics of men and women, producing nobler types and eliminating the weaklings. We may postpone old age and push off death. We may treat crime as a disease and cure the criminal by medical—or surgical—attention. We may develop or intensify human faculties so that the nervous system is more acutely perceptive of its environment, thus increasing joy and adding much to the knowledge and interest of life. We may raise the dignity of human intelligence to the height of the physical powers which now threaten us with destruction."

For at least half an hour Hesketh described his research work connected with internal secretions, showing by lantern slides the effect of glandular treatment upon tadpoles and frogs, rabbits and monkeys, in hurrying up or slowing down the metamorphosis of tadpoles, in renewing the vitality of rabbits and monkeys, in altering their emotional responses and physical characteristics. It was the work he had been doing in his laboratory when he had closed his door against Margaret, and in that menagerie of sick animals which she avoided in her garden. She did not pay much attention to his demonstrations. Once again she had a faint sense of distress about these things. It seemed to her, as once before, that Hesketh was trying to take the place of God! That

was absurd. It was almost blasphemous. It was treachery to Hesketh, her husband. And yet she could not get the idea out of her head. Science, she thought, ought not to interfere so much with the human body. Still less with the human mind. . . . Hesketh was saying something more about surgical treatment for criminals—the possible removal of some gland which created criminal instincts. How frightful it would be if one were arrested for some trivial offence—exceeding the speed limit—and handed over to surgeons! They might alter one's whole character. Evil men in control of States might make monsters, or freaks, or idiotic slaves of people. She had just read a book by Maeterlinck—*La Vie des Termites*. Those insects could make soldier ants with great mandibles, or worker ants without them, by special kinds of food. Perhaps humanity would be like that—specialised or standardised. . . . These strange distressful thoughts came to her in the darkness of the Albert Hall while Hesketh was showing his lantern slides. All the people were very quiet, listening intently. Perhaps Richard Halliday was among them in his shabby clothes and big boots. She would like to hear his opinion about Hesketh's lecture. He wouldn't agree with it. . . .

Hesketh was talking about his Religion of Reason again. The lights had gone up and he had abandoned his manuscript and was talking without notes. His eyes, behind horn-rimmed glasses, were lighted up by enthusiasm. His hair was quite disorderly and his dress tie had departed from his collar. He was saying something about the inevitable conflict between Science and Religion unless the leaders of world thought accepted the findings of science without mental reservations. If humanity desired to save itself, he said, from chaos and destruction, from mental and physical degeneracy, from the instruments of death which had been put within its grasp, it would have to pay more attention to science and raise its standards of intelligence. The gradual abandonment of the old religions which were outworn and

inconsistent with modern knowledge left a weakness in the moral structure of society. There must be a religion—a law of life—an ideal of conduct. It was no longer provided by the Churches, all wrangling over small points of doctrine or ritual to which the mass mind was utterly indifferent. Science was developing a new religion, not based upon revelation but upon knowledge and evidence of natural laws. Man's sense of beauty and loveliness and law might be devoted to it. Not concerned with some other life, of which there was no proof, it would concentrate human energy upon the improvement of this life so that it would be richer in happiness, in health, in intellectual experience, in physical satisfaction freed from all disharmonies between mind and body, or between the individual and his environment. The code of morality would be based upon liberty—under the discipline of scientific law which would safeguard the community. There would be world peace, no longer menaced by fears and hatreds, but secure by reason and common sense raised to a high standard, and co-operation for the common weal of the whole human race.

"The Youth of to-day," said Hesketh, his voice rising emotionally to a high pitch, "has a glorious future ahead, if it will swear allegiance to the Spirit of Reason and give up its worship of old fetishes and old myths. If it will abandon the religion of magic for the religion of Reason, it will find that science has golden gifts in its inexhaustible treasury, natural miracles more wonderful than in supernatural legends, adventures more stirring than heroic epics of slaughter and butchery. . . . I call upon Youth—this modern, fearless, audacious youth of ours—to fulfil its destiny as pioneers of the Age of Reason whose light is beginning to shine through the gates of Time. From what I know of them, as a father and a teacher, they have the spirit, the quality, the courage, and the self-control, to lead us forward to that new era. They look at life with eyes of truth. They turn their backs upon old tradition. They have the scientific mind. They are

ready to take risks and are not afraid. . . . I dedicate my work to them!"

So he ended that address of which Margaret, his wife, had heard only passages here and there because her mind had been wandering on secret thoughts.

XLIV

THERE was a great outburst of applause from the galleries and scattered applause, less violent and noisy, from the stalls and boxes. Bearded gentlemen were shaking Hesketh's hand one after another, with polite enthusiasm. Viola was leaning out of the box shouting "Hooray!" and waving her papers. There was that strange murmurous roar of thousands of people all talking together loudly. Audley Instone, alert again, was helping Margaret on with her furs, and Cyril was lighting a cigarette outside the box, regardless of law. Suddenly from the centre of the hall a man's voice rang out harsh and loud above the hubbub.

"Beware of false prophets! Unless ye wash in the Blood of the Lamb—"

Margaret heard the words, and turned round sharply to look at the speaker. But he was pulled down from a chair by those about him and disappeared into the crowd. It was the one challenge in that hall to Hesketh's speech, and Margaret turned pale with emotion and caught hold of Viola's arm.

"Did you hear?" she asked.

"Some lunatic!" said Viola, laughing. "Wasn't father splendid? Aren't you proud of him, Margaret?"

"It was very interesting," said Margaret. "Although I don't understand—"

"That was pretty good about Youth," said Viola. "A nice tribute to Cyril and me! . . . 'They look at life with eyes of truth.' 'They take risks and are not afraid.' . . . Well done, father! . . . Guy, my little one, take me to some place where I can quaff a goblet of gin or something that elevates the human heart. This is the Jerninghams' night out."

"Oh, but aren't you coming back with me?" exclaimed Margaret. "I'm sure Guy is tired and ought to go to bed. It's much too late for anything else."

"It's never too late for anything else," Viola answered with a laughing obstinacy.

" 'No sleep till morn when youth and pleasure meet
To chase the glowing hours with flying feet.'

You'd better come with us, Margaret. Audley knows all the low haunts. Let's celebrate father's inauguration of the Age of Reason. What about it, you people?"

Audley turned with his polite smile to Margaret.

"I'd love to take you somewhere."

For a moment she was tempted. She was not much older than Viola and it was a chilly house at Wimbledon, and Hesketh was staying in Town for the night with one of his scientists. It was Cyril who turned the scale in favour of Suburbia and duty.

"I'm going home anyhow. I hate jazz bands and perspiring females."

"You're a cankered soul," said Viola. "Coming, Guy?"

Guy hesitated, weakly, and then yielded.

"We might put in an hour at the Berkeley."

"Well, I shall go back home with Cyril," said Margaret. "Don't forget to catch the last train, you wanton." She shook her finger at Viola and had a grudge against her for capturing Guy so completely. He could never resist her allurement, though he seemed to struggle against it sometimes.

Viola quoted her father again.

" 'They take great risks and are not afraid!' "

Then she grabbed Guy's arm and ran with him through one of the doors leading out of the Albert Hall.

"I'm sorry you won't come," said Audley. "It's a long time since we had a dance together."

She was tempted again because of the invitation in his eyes, and that thought of dancing with him, and his shy devotion.

"Another night!" she said. "If you'll give me the chance."

He laughed as though the chance were waiting for her always.

"Coming, Margaret?" said Cyril, rather grumpily. "I'll get a taxi, if you'll wait outside."

But she could not go just then, because her father made his way through the people surging out of the hall, and touched her arm.

"Well, Margaret! Your husband spoke brilliantly to-night, eh? But dangerous stuff, I'm afraid. My word! As a Canon of the Church of England—"

He smiled and shook his head, as though he couldn't go as far as Hesketh, though very tolerant of modern ideas.

"The Age of Reason!" he said, smiling this time at the surge of people passing him—those professors and school-teachers, and elderly women and earnest young men, "No, no! . . . I'm not such an optimist. . . . And in any case, I'm a pillar of the Church! I don't want to see the roof fall in. . . . Here's your mother. I thought I had lost her."

Margaret's mother had her hand on the arm of the Bishop of Belgravia, who was a little feeble.

"My darling child!" she exclaimed when she saw Margaret. "What a marvellous man your dear husband is! How proud you must be of him! But I do wish you would get him interested in the Second Phase of Tribulation. I feel certain it would make him revise some of his ideas. Science is very wonderful, but it cannot go against the Pyramids. Destiny must be fulfilled, don't you agree, Bishop?"

"No," said the Bishop. "And I utterly disagree with everything I have heard this evening. Most destructive. Most alarming. Unmitigated materialism. If they broadcast things like that this nation is doomed. I shall write a letter to *The Times*."

Margaret's father winked at her over the Bishop's shoulder.

"It will certainly lead to great discussion," he said soothingly. "But we must face these ideas. We must build a bridge somehow. . . . I'm a bridge-builder. . . . I wonder if it's raining?"

It was raining, and he held his umbrella ready for the Bishop.

Margaret waited for Cyril to signal about the cab and Audley left her, to look for him, but owing to the wet night there was a rush on every taxi. Groups of people waited on the portico while the rain swept the broad stretch of pavement upon which the lamps shone, turning it to liquid gold. Margaret stood alone now among the people who were still coming out of the hall to the main exits. She heard some of their comments about her husband.

"Nice eyes, hadn't he?" . . . "Those tadpoles were funny. The things he does with them!" . . . "Birth Control is what we want. Look at the unemployed." . . . "Rough on religion, wasn't he? Those parsons." . . . "I don't see where the soul comes in." . . . "Well, it's all very difficult." . . . "Oughtn't to be allowed in a Christian country." . . . "Gave me the creeps."

Then she felt her arm clutched by someone and turned round sharply and saw Hesketh smiling at her. He was excited and his eyes gleamed through his horn-rimmed glasses, and that white tie of his was a disgrace to his evening clothes.

"Luck to find you, my dear!" he said. . . . "Just to say good night. . . . I hope you weren't too enormously bored?"

"Why should I be bored?" she asked, and tried to show a little enthusiasm. "You spoke awfully well, Hesketh. . . . But, oh, that tie of yours!"

There and then she made him tidy, and people who recognised him as they passed smiled and nudged each other.

"Just like a woman!" he said, laughing, good-humouredly.

"Here have I been giving a message to the world and all she worries about is whether I look like a waiter."

That wasn't true, really. She was worrying about other things—the things he had said to the world that night. She hadn't agreed with him. She hated some of the things he said. She didn't believe in his Age of Reason. There were spiritual things which he denied. His philosophy of life seemed to her all wrong. It led nowhere beyond death. If people hadn't souls— But she let him think that she was worrying only about his tie, and gave the bow a little pat, and said, "That's much better!"

"Home to lunch," he told her. "My first night away from you. I shall feel home-sick."

He was like a schoolboy, in spite of his science.

He kissed her hand before he dashed away to a group of professors waiting for him.

Cyril and Audley were still searching for a taxi. She stood out on the portico, glad of the wet wind on her face. Perhaps Hesketh was right after all, she thought rather miserably. How absurd it was of her to go against him in her mind—her little, ignorant, schoolgirl mind! Perhaps there was nothing spiritual or supernatural about life, but just a material process with minds which worked by some complicated arrangement of chemical actions. Rather silly being born, really, if that were all it meant.

She turned her head as though someone had called her name, and saw Richard Halliday standing below the steps, in the rain, with his coat collar turned up. He took off his hat and came up the steps to her.

"I was hoping to see you," he said.

"What did you think of Hesketh's speech?" she asked. She had been wanting to know what he thought all the evening.

He laughed quietly, as though he had been much amused.

"I thought we'd got beyond all that—ages ago! Your husband is terribly old-fashioned, isn't he? . . . Wasn't

there a man named Paul who warned us against 'the learned words of human wisdom' and advised us 'to compare spiritual things with spiritual'? Nearly two thousand years ago!"

"Hadn't you better stand out of the rain?" asked Margaret.

He didn't seem to think the rain mattered.

"Reason doesn't explain the Resurrection," he said, "and that wants a lot of explanation. They weren't liars who believed it first. They died for their belief, and it takes a lot of courage to face nasty ways of death. One doesn't risk it for a lie. I wouldn't! . . . There are two young men waving to you. I expect it's your taxi."

It was, and Margaret touched the arm of Richard Halliday for a moment and then went down the steps where Audley held open the door of the cab.

"A great evening," he said. "Thanks so much. Of course, I didn't understand a word of all that science. Quite beyond me—but splendid to be with you."

"You snoozed awhile!" she told him teasingly, and asked him to say "Waterloo."

"Hop in," said Cyril.

She hopped in, and waved her hand to Audley standing close in evening clothes, with the rain beating on his opera hat, and to Richard Halliday, shabby, very wet about the shoulders, bare-headed still, with the light of the Albert Hall lamps shining on his thin white face. Audley Instone and Richard Halliday—what a contrast in types!—the one typical of charming youth, the other of sacrifice and the spiritual life. They represented some conflict in this girl's mind, though she was hardly aware of it.

"Well," said Cyril in the taxi-cab, "thank goodness that's over! . . . The governor was simply awful. That Age of Reason stuff. . . . Hell's bells!"

XLV

THE house at Wimbledon looked dark and cheerless when Margaret arrived home with Cyril after Hesketh's lecture, but she lit the gas-fire in the study and helped Cyril to make some cocoa in the kitchen. She shirked going into that lonely bedroom upstairs, and it was pleasant to sit on the hearth-rug in front of the fire while Cyril lay back in a leather arm-chair sucking at his pipe with long periods of silence. He had read the evening paper stolidly in the train on the way home and had only grunted a word or two in the cab they had taken from the station. That was characteristic of him and no sign of bad temper. Now, sitting there on the hearth-rug, she broke into his secret thoughts.

"Don't you think you had better go to bed, Cyril? It's getting late."

"It's pretty good here," he said.

"I shall wait up for Viola."

"No need."

It was half an hour later when she felt conversational again.

"You didn't seem to like Hesketh's lecture, Cyril."

"I loathed it."

She wondered why he loathed it. After all, he had the scientific mind. He wasn't like Guy, who had the artistic temperament and disliked science as mere materialism. This boy Cyril had been brought up as the heir to Hesketh's mind, steeped in science from babyhood. Once he had startled her by confessing that he felt the need of religion, but they had never referred to that subject again until now.

"It's rather hard on Hesketh," she said. "His wife and

son as critics on the hearth! Why do you disagree with him, Cyril?"

"The governor has a fatal habit of talking through his hat," he answered. "He went beyond his facts altogether. He's a biologist, not a prophet. Not even a psychologist. Poor old father has as much knowledge of psychology as one of his sick rabbits. All that muck about youth, for instance! What was it? . . . 'The spirit, the quality, the courage, the self-control to lead us forward to a new era.' . . . Rats! Modern youth, as far as I know it through Viola, and that brother of yours, and young Instone, and others, isn't bothering about a new era of High Intelligence. It just wants to have a damn good time—generally at someone else's expense."

"Oh, Cyril, that's frightfully cynical!" said Margaret, using her hands as a screen against the warmth of the fire. "Our crowd is better than that. I think we're rather nice on the whole! Only we haven't found ourselves quite, isn't that it? I mean, we're getting away from tradition and not finding anything to put in its place. Do you think Reason is any good, Cyril? Honestly. Do you think it can ever take the place of God? I mean the idea of God?"

Cyril pondered over that with a dry smile about his lips which Margaret saw as she shifted round on the hearth-rug.

"The idea of God—it seems to me—is limited by human reason. Every age has its own idea of God. Probably every individual."

"Yes, but what about revelation?" asked Margaret. "That is why Hesketh will shock so many people. He shocks me, Cyril, and I feel rather bad about it. He denies revelation. That's denying Christ, and the Resurrection and everything like that. I had a few words with Mr. Halliday this evening—while you were getting that taxi. He quoted something that Paul said, and then said, 'Reason doesn't explain the Resurrection.'"

"No," said Cyril. "But the point is whether the Resurrection ever happened. To tell you the honest truth—"

He laughed, as though the honest truth amused him.

"What?" asked Margaret.

"I've been reading the New Testament lately, for the first time. Bought it for tuppence on a bookstall. Amazing document, isn't it? Beats our modern novelists to a frazzle. I mean as a human story."

"Do you believe it?" asked Margaret.

He polished the bowl of his pipe against his nose—it was a little habit of his.

"I'm bound to say it seems to be written with sincerity. But of course it may have been touched up afterwards. . . . Still, the character of Christ comes through. Rather remarkable. Makes one think a bit."

He stretched his arms and yawned.

"Oh, Lord! What's the use of thinking? We can never know anything except a few elementary facts about chemistry and physics, which don't explain a damn thing. . . . Did I hear you say something about bed, old girl?"

"For you," she said. "I shall stay up till Viola comes in."

"Quite unnecessary."

He stood still, looking down at her for a moment, with his hands in his pockets, and a queer quizzical smile.

"Getting fed up with the family?" he asked. "You've been a bit fractious with the governor lately!"

"Oh, Cyril!" she cried, with a sudden flush of colour and a guilty look in her eyes.

"He means well," said Cyril, "and he's frightfully keen on you. But of course you ought never to have married him really. Young Instone was your kind of bloke. Simple and stupid and sick with love for you. He can't hide it, poor brute."

"Cyril!" cried Margaret again. "How dare you say such things? They're frightful. They're—wicked!"

She flashed out at him sharply. It was the first time that she had ever been annoyed with him, but now she was deeply distressed, and very angry.

"Sorry!" he said. "You know how I blurt out things."

"You shouldn't," she answered quickly. "Especially when they're things like that—so utterly untrue."

"Sorry!" he said again. "But I'm all for truth. And on your side, whatever happens. I wish to goodness I'd met you before the governor did. Rotten bad luck—when one's own father marries the nicest girl in the world!"

He was just teasing her, it seemed, by the way he stood smiling at her. And yet she was rather afraid for a moment. She was always being frightened in the Jerningham family. They behaved differently from other people. They had different ideas. They said the most alarming things as though they were simple and natural. They didn't believe in God. They were utterly lawless—at least Viola and Cyril.

"There are lots of nice girls in the world, Cyril. Why don't you marry one? Betty Winter, for instance. She's rather keen on you."

That was true. Betty Winter's eyes went soft at the sight of him. Lately she had been over to tea rather more often than usual, and had looked disappointed when Cyril departed to his work abruptly at the earliest excuse.

"Oh, Lord!" he said. "That passionate female with red hair? She fills me with terror. . . . A dreadful thought!"

He collected his tobacco pouch and pipe and stuffed them in his pocket.

"Well, good night," he said. "Not angry with me?"

He glanced at her sideways with a humorous smile.

"I'll forgive you," she said, "if you'll never speak like that again."

He grinned and came close to her and said, "Good night, stepmother! . . . What about a kiss of peace?"

It was the first time she had ever kissed him, and she

blushed a little as she did so . . . but there was no harm in it, and he made a joke of it.

"I'm a motherless orphan," he said, "and oh, so lonely in a naughty world!"

Then he sloped off to bed and left her alone before the fire, waiting for Viola.

She heard several taxi-cabs passing the front gate, taking Wimbledon folk home after the theatre. They must have caught the last train from Town. Viola ought to be in now in a few minutes. . . . But more than a few minutes passed —half an hour, and then an hour—and still she did not come. Perhaps she was taking a taxi all the way from Town. Just like her to do an extravagant thing like that, the hussy! Hesketh would have to pay for it, and would do so without a grumble, as Viola was the apple of his eye, and nothing that she did seemed wrong to him. Well, it meant waiting for some time longer, and Margaret was getting sleepy. . . . She hadn't enjoyed Hesketh's lecture very much. It had disturbed her mind again with all sorts of doubts and spiritual distress. She was glad she had met Richard Halliday on the steps. He stood for the other side of things—and it was really her side. She would go down and scrub that floor for him. She would get him to give her faith again. She would make him her guide back to the places of the spirit. She would tell Hesketh that she needed religion. . . . She fell asleep with her head against the leather chair in which Cyril had sat and with her legs curled up on the hearth-rug.

She wakened when she felt cold, although the gas-fire was burning with a red glow. But a draught had crept under the door and made her shivering cold. Strange that Viola had not come in yet! It must be getting very late.

It was very early. The clock on the mantelpiece pointed to half-past five. A faint light illumined the window-blinds. It was the beginning of another day. And Viola hadn't come back.

A slight sense of panic took possession of Margaret. Not

real panic yet, but the approach of it. What had that girl been doing? She might have had some accident in London —been run over or something—or bumped into something on the way back. Something horrible might have happened. Only a month ago a girl had been strangled on Wimbledon Common. . . . No, it was ridiculous to let one's imagination frighten one like that! She had probably gone home with Guy and was sleeping quietly in Margaret's old bedroom. Or perhaps she had come back, and crept upstairs without coming into the study. Yes, of course!

Margaret went upstairs and opened Viola's bedroom door and called to her quietly. There was no answer, and she went inside and switched on the light. Viola's bed was empty, and the sight of it made Margaret put her hands to her breast. She ought never to have allowed her to go off with Guy like that. Hesketh would be frightfully anxious if he came home before she arrived.

Margaret was panic-stricken now, though quite unreasonably. Viola was not a child. It was perfectly probable that she was sleeping in Belgravia, in Margaret's old room. But at half-past five in the morning, after a night on the hearth-rug, Margaret's nerves were ragged. She went to Cyril's room and tapped at the door, and then opened it and called to him.

"Cyril! Are you awake? . . . Cyril!"

He stirred and then sat up in bed and said, "Hullo!"

"Cyril," said Margaret, "Viola hasn't come home."

"What's that?" he asked sleepily.

She repeated the news.

"Not come home!" he said. "Well, what about it?"

"I'm anxious," said Margaret.

He laughed and then struck a match and lit the candle by his bedside, leaning on his pillow with one elbow. His pyjamas were open to the waist and his hair was wild.

"I'm much more anxious about you," he said. "Good

Lord, you haven't been to bed at all! And it's half-past five."

"But what about Viola?" she asked. "Cyril, I'm afraid something has happened to her. Something dreadful."

"Don't you believe it," he said. "She's probably dancing in some night club and eating eggs and bacon."

He refused to be worried. He also desired to sleep again. He implored Margaret to go to bed and let him sleep.

XLVI

MARGARET was telephoning to her father before breakfast—he was shaving, he told her—when she heard voices in the hall, and one of them was Viola's voice, very gay and hearty.

"They're just back!" she cried through the telephone, laughing with vexation but feeling a sense of enormous relief.

"Well, well!" said her father. "Give Guy a wigging from me. Disgraceful—honestly! I like to be broad-minded, but one must draw the line somewhere."

He said, "Good-bye, my dear," and went back to his shaving.

The door opened and Viola came in with Guy.

"Sorry, old girl!" said Viola.

She didn't look in the least sorry but very much amused by herself, though sleepy. She gave a laughing yawn and flung herself down in an arm-chair with her legs outstretched and her evening frock all crumpled, like a Columbine, after the last dance.

"Hope you weren't worried?" she enquired.

"I *was* worried," said Margaret. "Most frightfully. Guy, I think it's too bad of you. What on earth have you been doing?"

Guy looked a wreck in his evening clothes with the morning light revealing the pallor of his face. He shrugged his shoulders slightly and avoided Margaret's eyes.

"We made a night of it," he said. "One has to pay the price of course."

"But, Guy," cried Margaret, "how could you be so idiotic?" After her night of anxiety—of terror even—she couldn't let things pass with Viola's "Sorry, old girl!" And Guy looked awful, with dark lines under his eyes.

"Oh, don't blame the child," said Viola. "It was I who led him astray. I was the naughty nymph who beguiled him through dark forests. . . . Still, I must say we had a most amusing time, didn't we, *mon camarade?*"

"You seemed to be enjoying yourself," said Guy with a pale smile. "I wish I had half your vitality. Personally I feel rather weak."

He sat down in an arm-chair limply, his chin on his chest.

Then Cyril sloped in, unshaven, in his dressing-gown, with carpet slippers. He glanced sharply from Guy to Viola and grinned ironically at their exhausted appearance.

"Good morrow, sweet things!" he said. "Had a nice time?"

"Priceless!" said Viola. "But oh, so sleepy!"

She yawned with exaggerated violence.

"You're a beauty, you are!" remarked Cyril with dark sarcasm. "Would it be impertinent to ask where you spent your night of debauchery, or is that a secret between you and your victim?"

Viola turned to Guy with an enquiring smile.

"Where did we spend the night, Guy? . . . I seem to remember places brightly lit by innumerable lamps, and polished floors stretching towards eternity, and silken divans in hidden bowers where houris sat in amorous dalliance with young unbearded men. I recall the sound of rhythmic music and the scent of waxen flowers . . . but at some period of a night of pleasure my senses must have fainted. . . . My next remembrance is of a little house on wheels in the cold grey light of dawn. It reeked with the gracious smell of eggs and bacon, mingled perhaps with sausages and mashed."

Cyril looked at Margaret and grinned.

"What did I tell you!" he exclaimed, with the pride of a prophet who has been fulfilled. "Didn't I say she would be eating eggs and bacon while you were worrying yourself to death? It shows the folly of worrying about anybody. . . . And speaking about eggs and bacon, how about breakfast?"

"Yes," said Viola. "How about hot coffee—and plenty of it? Guy, my little one, a cup of coffee—or even three cups of coffee—will restore the colour to your cheeks, which are sadly blanched. Unless it's conscience that makes a ghost of you?"

"I shall have to tell Hesketh," said Margaret, in her most stepmotherly manner. "I shall have to make a row about it."

She felt very angry with Viola and deeply distressed about Guy. He had fallen from grace in her eyes. It was so unlike him—so out of character.

"Oh, father won't mind!" laughed Viola. "What did he say? 'They take great risks and are not afraid.' Excellent words! We're not afraid, are we, Guy?"

"I feel like the Rake's Progress."

Viola danced towards him and took hold of his hands, and pulled him out of his chair, and stood with one arm about him.

"My weakling, my ewe lamb!" she cried. "Pull yourself together and don't look so miserable after a merry night!"

She was sleepy, but had not exhausted her reserves of energy. Her spirit was stronger than Guy's. She was the modern type of girlhood, vital, untiring, enormously amused by life, more enduring than male youth in pursuit of pleasure.

XLVII

THEY were both asleep when Hesketh returned for lunch—Guy on the drawing-room sofa, Viola in her own room. And Hesketh declined to take the affair seriously, annoying Margaret a little—perhaps even a good deal—by laughing at this escapade.

"Youth will be youth," he said. "I've no doubt they enjoyed themselves."

"Yes, but Hesketh," said Margaret, "don't you think it's very dangerous?"

No, he couldn't see any danger anywhere. What kind of danger?

"Viola is very inflammable," said Margaret. "And Guy is ready to catch fire."

"Why not?" asked Hesketh. "Mother Nature likes to burn her hands at young hearts. Good luck to them!"

"Surely you don't think they ought to stay out all night together, Hesketh?"

Well, he thought they'd do much better in bed at a reasonable hour, but once in a way it might amuse them. Viola had abounding vitality.

"What about morality?" asked Margaret anxiously.

Hesketh laughed and pinched her ear.

"Don't worry about that! Viola can look after herself all right."

"I'm not sure that Guy can," said Margaret. "Viola has bewitched him. I'm getting nervous, Hesketh. He's not happy with her. She's too wild for him. And she has no principles of any kind. No more than a Zulu girl. . . . Less, I should say."

Hesketh refused to admit that Viola had no principles.

She belonged to the Age of Reason—healthy in mind and body, clear-eyed, utterly honest, dead straight.

"I know," said Margaret, "she's all that, of course, but she simply doesn't believe in the ordinary code of civilised life. She's pagan to the finger-tips. She says herself that she's a Behaviourist. I don't know what it means quite, but it's certainly very immoral."

Hesketh laughed heartily.

"Immoral be blowed, dear heart! I don't believe much anyhow in the old code of morality with its hideous taboos, and sneaking little fears, and endless prohibitions. Viola and others are working towards a new code, fearlessly and frankly. I bet it will be clean and sweet, loyal to love, comradely and sane."

Margaret's face flushed slightly and she spoke with a sudden emotion which startled Hesketh.

"You're all wrong, Hesketh. That Age of Reason of yours, it's—it's idiotic. It leaves out all the spiritual side of things. And you've left them out with Viola and Cyril. You can't leave them out, Hesketh! You really can't. Life doesn't work without them. It's bound to go all wrong."

Hesketh raised his eyebrows and looked a little dismayed.

"No sleep last night!" he said. "You ought to lie down a bit, dear heart. Nerves on the jag, eh? That'll never do."

She could not help laughing at him, weakly. It was so like him to think that if she would lie down for a bit she would forget her worries about Guy and Viola, and God, and life, and the mystery of everything, including herself.

"Sorry for talking like a little idiot," she said, and put her hands on his shoulders for a moment and let him kiss her on the forehead.

Then she slipped into the drawing-room where her brother lay asleep. One arm hung loosely from the sofa and he lay flat on his back with his head turned a little sideways towards her. The afternoon sun streamed through the windows and touched his face, very pale and delicate, and finely cut like

a Greek cameo. Margaret tiptoed towards him and stood looking down on him with emotion because of the comradeship that had been between them before her marriage. Somehow her marriage had spoilt it. He was Viola's friend now and she had second place. She noticed his wonderful likeness to their father. He had his father's face, only young and without the same strength—almost weak and girlish, as he lay there with some smile in his dreams, in evening clothes, with his tie hanging loose.

She sat down on the floor by his side and touched his hand with her lips, very softly, yet enough to make him open his eyes.

"Coming, Vi?" he murmured.

Margaret did not answer, and a few moments later he turned his head and looked at her, and then shifted his position and stretched himself.

"Good Lord!" he said, "I feel better for that. What's the time?"

She told him it was half-past four, and he seemed surprised, and lay still for a little while, with a faint smile about his lips. Then he sat up and looked at the ends of his white tie hanging down.

"I must look a bit of a wreck!" he exclaimed, with a laugh. "Last night was rather hectic, from what I remember of it."

"What *do* you remember?" asked Margaret, anxiously.

He put his hand to his head as though trying to remember.

"Some rotten night club—and sweet champagne—and a lot of silly asses—and Viola . . . Viola seemed to enjoy it. Had a great time, I must say, until the champagne began to work. Then she went to sleep in my arms. Rather embarrassing for a fellow like me! But nobody else seemed to mind. . . . After that we had supper, or breakfast, or something at a coffee-stall somewhere near the Palace Theatre. Viola again in great form. Delighted with dawn over the roofs of London. Rather vexed with me because I felt so rotten."

Margaret thought it might have been worse and her heart lurched at the thought. But it was bad enough anyhow—that picture of Viola drunk on champagne, sleeping in Guy's arms among a lot of other people—her shy, delicate, fastidious Guy, who had once been a mediævalist and an idealist, worshipping things of beauty and the spirit, detesting the vulgarities of modern life, cherishing an ideal of old-fashioned womanhood.

"Guy," she said, "can't you keep away from Viola? She's a pagan beauty, Guy, and she's dragging you down. She's spoiling your old ideals."

He stared at her as though surprised by this outburst and then shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"My ideals? Oh, Lord! . . . Anyhow I can't keep away from her. And I don't want to keep away from her. I want her—frightfully. I've loved her for months now, and it's rotting my whole life up in a way. I mean, I can't do a stroke of work. We've got to get married or something. Otherwise I shall go—rotten."

"Oh, Guy!" said Margaret. She felt stricken by his words.

"I know," he agreed. "It sounds pretty weak—but that's how it is. It's only fair to tell you."

Margaret was on her knees beside him, and she laid her face against one of his hands.

"My dear," she said, "is it as bad as that?"

"Well, it's like that," he answered. "The worst of it is she wants to play about a bit. I mean she won't hear of marriage yet awhile. She wants to give me a try-out—in case it doesn't work all right. It's her modern idea, you know. Science. Biology. Eugenics. The Age of Reason and all that!"

He laughed, rather bitterly, as though up against ideas which he detested.

"Guy! What do you mean by a try-out?"

"Oh, a sort of engagement," he explained. "She wants me

to go away with her somewhere. An unofficial honeymoon, so to speak."

He laughed nervously, and avoided Margaret's eyes as she raised her head and looked at him.

"Guy!" cried Margaret, "that's frightful. You can't reconcile it with the faith that's in you. You would be conscience-stricken."

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "It might be rather amusing."

Margaret took hold of his arms and held them tight.

"No!" she said. "For heaven's sake, Guy! It would be lowering your flag. It wouldn't be amusing. It would be just—degrading. I could never look you in the eyes again. It would spoil everything I think of you, all my reverence for your mind and heart—so clean, Guy, so pure, my dear! I couldn't bear it if you were to be so beastly. Viola doesn't mean it. She's only joking with you. She says wild things to shock you."

"Think so?" he asked doubtfully, and then seeing her distress, he agreed with her, hurriedly.

"Probably you're right. One never knows when she's serious. For heaven's sake don't let on that I mentioned that idea. . . . And anyhow, don't look so stricken, old girl. I don't see where the tragedy comes in."

It was Viola who came in, merry and bright, after a good sleep.

"Hullo, you people!" she said. "I'm feeling wonderful."

Margaret slipped away to hide the trouble in her eyes.

XLVIII

AT tea-time that afternoon Hesketh was amused, and slightly annoyed once or twice, by the newspaper comments on his address to the British Association. Most of them had reported it at fair length, and the more sensational papers had set it out under big headings.

"Leading Scientist Attacks Religion."
"Biologist Prophesies Miracles of Science."
"The Age of Reason Calls to Youth."

One of the evening papers rebuked Hesketh severely for his "insolent contempt" of revealed religion, and asked why a certain class of scientists dogmatised on subjects which were outside their range of knowledge. "It seemed astonishing," wrote this leader writer, "that a man so distinguished as Professor Hesketh Jerningham should fail in that humility which is the sure test of great minds, and should deny supernatural phenomena merely because they cannot be proved by the usual methods of the laboratory. 'There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio—' . . ."

Hesketh read out this passage to his family and laughed good-humouredly at this "solemn nonsense," as he called it.

"What muck!" cried Viola. "And very impudent to criticise you, father."

"Oh, I don't mind," said Hesketh. "The fellow has a right to his opinion, of course."

He turned to another page, smiling through his horners as he turned over the pages. What little vanity there was in him may have been tickled by this unaccustomed publicity. Even scientists working quietly in their laboratories are pleased when the limelight falls on their labours now and

then. He looked up slightly startled when Cyril made a challenging remark across the tea-table after reading the article in question.

"I must say I rather agree with this verdict, father. To be strictly honest."

Hesketh raised his eyebrows and smiled, but he had a puzzled look in his eyes.

"You're always honest, old boy! But I didn't expect you to be on the side of the obscurantists. Something new, isn't it? Or are you pulling my leg?"

"He's got a bee in his bonnet," said Viola, helping herself to another crumpet, and yawning slightly. "The lad has been going balmy for some time, Dad. You had better have a look at his thymus."

Cyril ignored this sisterly diagnosis. He looked his father in the eyes and asked a somewhat aggressive question.

"Don't you think it's rather a mistake to lay down the law about things clean outside the range of science? Religion, for instance."

Hesketh looked rather nettled, and his face flushed slightly.

"I don't agree that religion is outside the range of science. On the contrary, I am convinced that it is bound to expose the ignorant myths which still go under the name of religion, and that it remains for science to build up a more reasonable interpretation of life and to formulate the laws which should govern life."

"As you said last night, father," remarked Viola graciously, "and as you said jolly well. Cyril can't be expected to know anything about it because he was in a state of coma most of the time."

Cyril put his teaspoon in his hot tea and dabbed it on to the back of her hand, with brotherly brutality.

When her squeal of protest had been silenced, he addressed his father again.

"I don't want to be unfilial," he said, "but I must say I think you went beyond your book last night, father—speak-

ing as one scientist to another. H. G. Wells stuff I call it. As for the Age of Reason and all that, it seemed to me—well—unsound, if you'll allow me to say so."

"Is it well with the child?" asked Viola anxiously.

Hesketh was silent for a moment, rather thoughtful, perhaps a little shocked by his son's criticism. He glanced at him with a kind of wonderment, as though in the presence of something new and bewildering.

"I've always wanted you and Viola to say exactly what you like," he said quietly. "Liberty Hall, old boy, and free speech all the time. Hasn't that been our régime since you can first remember? . . . But why unsound?"

Cyril shrugged his shoulders.

"It's a long argument, father, hardly worth beginning at tea-time. It might last until the middle of next week if we once started."

"Fire away!" said Hesketh good-humouredly. "I've a high respect for your opinion, Cyril—as representing a generation ahead of mine. No doubt I'm old-fashioned. I'm always inclined to think that youth knows best."

"Thank you, father," said Viola, taking the last crumpet and sharing it with Guy, who was listening to this family discussion with a look of uneasiness, as though presently he might be drawn into it. "I will say, Daddy, speaking on behalf of the younger generation, that we're very much obliged to you for your kind words. Guy and I particularly appreciate that bit about our quality and spirit. . . . Don't we, Guy?"

Guy smiled faintly, and then blushed slightly as though thinking of that embarrassing situation when she had lain asleep in his arms.

"That's tripe in my opinion," said Cyril, impatiently. "Youth doesn't know a damn thing. What you want, Viola, my beauty, is discipline—and someone to treat you rough. So do I, and most of us, to be quite frank. The older generation kowtows to us too much—seems to think we've got some

new kind of vision and are working towards some new philosophy of life. Belief based on Instinct, or some bilge like that. As a matter of fact we've broken with tradition—because we've never been taught any—I'm speaking for you and me, Viola—young Guy over there is different—but we don't believe in anything. Not even in ourselves. We're just lawless. . . . Behaviourists at the mercy of our internal secretions or waiting for some primitive impulse to give us a jerk this way or that on some passionate adventure of a Freudian libido. Far better if we had been brought up as nice little Christians with a healthy respect for the Ten Commandments and compulsory church on Sunday. Theoretically I'm all for superstition and the supernatural. I rather hanker to be on the side of the angels, if I could believe in them. But as I've been taught to disbelieve in them—or any kind of spiritual life—I'm afraid of my own instincts, which are probably rather unpleasant."

He looked over at Margaret who sat quiet, listening to this discussion with breathless interest as though in some way her own life depended on it. Cyril was expressing her own ideas in a way, and revealing her own conflict, her own doubts about Hesketh's philosophy of life, her own craving for something more than science. And yet he frightened her rather. He was talking so bitterly and harshly to Hesketh. And he seemed to be suffering from some secret "complex," as he would say, as though afraid of something within himself, some trouble of adolescence, some physical and mental unhappiness.

"Oh, disloyal son, oh, treacherous brother!" cried Viola. "Do I hear with mine ears? Are these words spoken by a human tongue or by some monster of iniquity?"

She put her hands to her eyes as though staring at Cyril through strong sunlight. She spoke in the ridiculous way which she often adopted as a style of humour, but there was real amazement in her look. It was the first time Cyril had unlocked this door in his mind.

Hesketh had become rather pale suddenly. He had that bewildered look as though utterly puzzled by this sudden attack, this extraordinary outburst of criticism at his own tea-table, from the boy who, as he had once told Margaret, was the child of his brain. His hand trembled as he took his glasses off for a moment and then put them on again.

"My dear boy," he said quietly, and without any anger or irritation, "you're undermining my first principles. You're challenging everything I've done for you and Viola—all the liberty I've given you—our intellectual comradeship—our devotion to science—our worship of truth."

"Sorry, father," said Cyril. "It's because you taught us truth that I've been yapping like this. It was your lecture last night—that Age of Reason stuff—it seemed to me wrong, somehow. You see, I know my own crowd. We're just floundering. We're going to be most damnably unreasonable. There's no faith in us, because there's no authority behind us, or over us. There must be something beyond science—I'm coming to believe there is—or if there isn't, then life isn't worth a damn, and just a freak of biochemistry. I'm sorry you brought me into such a silly hoax."

Hesketh rose from the tea-table. He was quite pale now, as though deeply hurt and even a little angry.

"Et tu, Brute!" he said harshly, and went suddenly from the room. It was the first time he had ever spoken harshly to his son.

XLIX

HESKETH'S address to the British Association let loose a spate of controversy in the Press and pulpits of England. One of the more sensational newspapers ran it as a regular "stunt," worked it up by interviews with prominent people, gave columns of space to a flood of letters, and bribed parsons to preach sermons about it by the promise of flattering publicity. Mr. Bernard Shaw surprised his friends and startled his enemies by placing himself on the side of the angels and asserting his conviction that England must become religious or perish. "Under whatever name we think of God," he wrote, "whether it be Creative Evolution or the Elan Vital, there must be worship in our hearts for a spiritual faith. The gross materialism of Neo-Darwinism is, thank goodness, dead and damned, but poor ignorant souls are at the mercy of quack scientists who pose as prophets. Why doesn't some idealist print millions of copies of my preface in *Back to Methusaleh* and distribute it to the English-reading peoples?"

Five Anglican Bishops signed a joint letter protesting against Professor Jerningham's denial of the supernatural and denouncing his proposals to substitute surgery for salvation. Spiritualists begged him to attend their séances. A gentleman from Eastbourne proclaimed him as the Anti-Christ and proved it by reference to the Apocalypse and Deuteronomy. Christian Scientists sent him innumerable pamphlets and wrote to the Press with quotations from Mrs. Eddy. Strange forms of religious mania were revealed by letters from lunatic asylums and from unmarried ladies in the country. The Antivivisectionists appealed to lovers of animals to prevent operations on rabbits and monkeys. A

Jesuit priest wrote a simple statement of the Catholic faith and prophesied that the Anglican Church would not be able to resist the assaults of Free Thought which were beginning to overwhelm it, nor the internal anarchy revealed by its bishops and clergy.

But very quickly this newspaper correspondence took a new twist. It was Hesketh's appeal to youth which was seized upon by newspaper readers, and for weeks the controversy raged between those who believed that the younger generation was betraying its heritage and those who, like Hesketh himself, believed that youth would lead the world to a new era of reason and progress. Short skirts and silk stockings, the curse of jazz, the abomination of night clubs and cocktails, the bad manners of the modern young man, the absurdity of the flapper vote, made the text of innumerable letters from "Fathers of Families" and "Mothers of Sons" and "Old-fashioned Fogeys" and "Octogenarians" and "Early Victorians," but Youth itself remained for the most part silent. Only now and then appeared a shrewd, cold, unemotional little letter signed "City Typist" or "Strap-hanger," repudiating everything said for or against the younger generation and expressing an ironical view of life, free from romantic illusions, burning ideals, or any of those qualities of "flaming youth" with which they were credited by modern novelists and Sunday journalists.

"For heaven's sake," wrote one young woman, "leave us alone to worry our way through life as best we may! We utterly decline to be pioneers of a new age, or apostles of a new faith, or martyrs in a new war. We refuse to be psycho-analysed. Most of us are just rather ignorant, fairly moral, quite intelligent young people, with a sense of humour and normal interests. We try to learn something from our elders, but are hopelessly misled. We have open eyes, but no convictions. We don't believe politicians or preachers, but we behave as respectfully as possible and hide our smiles. We like listening to the wireless, but switch off when pompous

voices interrupt the music. We prefer to be amused, and we're not worrying much about our souls just yet, thank you very much. As for the Age of Reason—perhaps the old people will begin first. We shall be delighted to watch them getting reasonable."

But while this altercation raged in the newspapers, Hesketh's philosophy of life was put to the test in his own household, and it was Margaret on one side and Viola on the other in this private clash of views. It was Viola who forced the issue one day by announcing calmly over the supper-table that she and Guy had arranged to do a walking tour together for a few weeks in the South of France.

"Splendid!" said Hesketh, who did not seem to notice anything wrong with this idea.

"Arles, Avignon, Nimes," said Viola, as though reciting a pleasant ballad. "Little old inns. Roads white with dust. Blue skies. Red wine for thirsty throats. Sunsets with flame-tipped feathers, which Guy will paint or remember in his heart. Won't you, Guy?"

"It sounds good," said Guy, with an uneasy laugh and a quick glance at Margaret.

"But, Viola," said Margaret quietly, though there was a strange tremor in her voice, "I thought you had agreed to stay with me at Audley Instone's villa—his people's villa—on the Riviera? Wasn't that the arrangement—at the beginning of March?"

"A month from now," said Viola. "That will give Guy and me time to do a bit of walking first. If Guy hasn't weakened before we get to Mentone—and there are always trains, of course—we can put him up at the local pub or squeeze him into somebody's bedroom."

"Whose?" asked Cyril, with an affectation of innocence.

"Mine, perhaps," said Viola calmly. "It depends whether we have quarrelled on the way. To be quite honest, dear people, Guy and I have made a sort of compact with each other. We propose to try each other out, so to speak. So

we're going on that walking tour, for a bit of sketching, and as much comradeship as we can get without bickering, and perhaps—though you never can tell—perfect love at the journey's end—the tintinabulation of the merry marriage bells. How's that for a good idea?"

There was a moment's silence. Guy's face had gone rather white. For some reason all eyes except his were turned on Margaret. Hesketh looked at her apprehensively, and Cyril had a watchful, alert look, in which there was a hint of humour. Viola was frankly satisfied with her own point of view.

"It's not a good idea," said Margaret. She pushed a plate away from her, as though her food sickened her. "It may be all right for Viola, but it's not good for Guy. He's different. And—and—I don't agree with that kind of thing. I'm not narrow-minded or anything like that—I've been changed since I became a scientist's wife!—but I still try to believe in decency. Especially for Guy, who is an idealist, with a conscience. Hesketh, I'm going to ask you not to allow Viola to do this thing. If you have any authority over her—and any love for me—"

"Poor old Dad!" said Cyril. "Did I hear something about 'authority over Viola'?" He laughed boisterously, while Viola threw a bit of bread at him and said, "Shut up, Cyril!"

Hesketh was perturbed. He looked from Margaret to Viola, and his eyes softened. "I have love for both of you," he said. "You know that, Margaret, don't you? But I don't see why Viola and Guy shouldn't go for a tramp together. Honestly, Margaret, what's wrong with it? It seems to me a sound way of getting to know each other."

Viola clapped her hands softly.

"Quite so, father! How wise you are for a man of advancing years. How indifferent to the old taboos! . . . Seriously, father, how can I possibly get hitched up for life with Guy before I know whether I can stand a week of him alone? How much better to settle that question in advance

instead of entering into a lifelong contract which we might bitterly regret. I should be false to all your teaching, I should disappoint your lovely prophecies, I should be no longer a daughter of your mind, if I made a messy marriage with this passionate youth who loves the grace of my body but is not yet converted to the splendour of our scientific faith."

Hesketh smiled at her rhodomontade.

"Do talk seriously, Viola," he said, with a nervous glance at Margaret. "What's the real idea at the back of all this? You're not playing about with young Guy, are you? I mean, are you two young people really in love with each other, or only fooling?"

"Guy is in love with me," said Viola, with sudden simplicity. "It's my fault, father, to tell the truth. I must admit that. He didn't want to fall in love with me a bit, really. In fact, he loathes my type intellectually. Don't you, Guy?"

Guy's face flushed, and he laughed nervously without answering.

Viola shifted her chair towards him and patted his hand.

"Poor little Guy! So mediæval until he met this pagan lady! . . . It was the dancing that did it, father. My sense of rhythm, and the sudden call of the mating season. I *did* play about with him a little, and now I'm sorry because it isn't quite fair on him. You see, Guy has a conscience, father! It's always pricking him and convincing him of sin, when there's no sin. I can't understand it, but I make allowances for the son of an Anglican parson. Heredity and environment, father. Terribly strong! And it's just because I want to be fair that I'm going on this tour with him. We can get to know each other when we're alone together unhampered by the family and the atmosphere of Wimbledon. He'll see me at my best and worst—when I've got pebbles in my shoes, when we take the wrong turning and get cross and tired. When I want to bathe in some shining wayside

pool. When I criticise his sketches. At the end of a week I shall know if he really loves me. At the end of three weeks I shall know if I like him enough to let him love me. By the time we get to Mentone we shall either be ready for the wedding breakfast or Guy's conscience will have got the better of him and I shall be a lonely virgin—at least, lonely for a time. You see how reasonable it is, father. How moral—whatever Margaret says. How sensible and scientific! . . . 'They take great risks and are not afraid.' That's our text, father, on high authority."

Hesketh glinted at her through his glasses. He could not be angry with her. She was not only quoting his words. She was expressing his ideas. He could not go back on a hundred frank talks with this daughter of his who had questioned him about the mating instinct, and whom he had warned, almost passionately—before he married Margaret—against hasty and uncertain marriage! And yet he was nervous of Margaret now, because he knew that Viola's frankness and unconventional ideas would hurt the tradition of her mind and upbringing, and because he hated hurting her.

"I can't see much wrong with it," he said. "Of course, Wimbledon wouldn't approve, but if we're going to get on with the Age of Reason, I'm afraid Wimbledon will have to be ignored."

"Exactly!" said Viola, looking very pleased with him.

"Quite!" said Cyril dryly. "It's going to be an object-lesson in the higher Eugenics—though personally I think it's a fatuous idea, and rather squallid. Wimbledon, after all, has something to say for itself. We can't ignore the social code as though we didn't belong to it. I'm not a conventionalist, but I'm beginning to believe in the law of the tribe. Otherwise I might run amok like Viola—and God help Wimbledon if I once take the brakes off. All these semi-detached maidens round about would be in frightful jeopardy."

"Oh, shut up, Cyril!" said Viola.

"Margaret is about to speak," he remarked, holding up his hand for silence, and looking at Margaret with a kind of whimsical expectation, as though he were anxious to hear her views.

She was very pale and there was a look of great distress in her eyes. When she spoke it was not to Hesketh or Viola, but to her brother Guy.

"Guy," she said, "you mustn't go with Viola like that. I thought you had given up the idea. I thought Viola was only joking."

"I don't see much objection to it," he answered in a low voice. "What's wrong with it? It ought to be rather—amusing."

"You'd hate yourself, Guy."

"Well, I'm going," he said, stubbornly. "To-morrow morning, as a matter of fact. I've got the tickets in my pocket."

He pulled them out of his pocket—in a little black book with an elastic band round it which he threw on the table before him with a laugh which was not quite happy.

"To-morrow!" exclaimed Hesketh. "I say, that's rather sudden of you two conspirators."

"Yes," said Viola calmly. "Guy rather wanted to slip off quietly without a fuss. But it didn't seem to me quite fair. Not straight, I mean. . . . Besides, I shall have to touch you for a little money, father. Sorry!"

There was silence for a moment, and Hesketh saw that Margaret looked "upset" and unhappy. He left his place at the table and went round to her and put his hand on her shoulder, tenderly. But she pushed his hand away and spoke to Guy again.

"No, Guy," she said. "You mustn't. . . . I can't let you. . . . Other men might, but not you. It's against everything you are. . . . You'd feel rotten about it. . . . Smirched and spoilt. . . . I know how much you love Viola. But if

she won't marry you decently, you'll have to keep away from her, that's all. . . . You see, Guy, you and I are religious really although we've broken away. We belong to the Christian tradition, because of father, and our home, and all that. It belongs to our mind. . . . I ought never to have married a man who doesn't believe in God. It makes it so hard to be loyal, if one's tempted. And we're all tempted sometimes, Guy."

She broke down for a moment and turned her face away and didn't seem to hear Hesketh's sudden cry of "Margaret!" For a moment she had tears in her eyes, and then spoke to Guy again as though she were alone with him with no one to hear, though Cyril was listening with a look of intensity and Viola was staring at her in amazement.

"Guy," she said, "this family doesn't belong to us. Their minds are different. Their code. Their way of looking at life. . . . I love them all very much—even Viola with her pagan spirit. But they're dragging us down, Guy. Even Hesketh is dragging me down because he denies the faith I need to keep me straight."

"Margaret!" cried Hesketh again, in a startled voice.

"You and I will go away, Guy," said Margaret, ignoring that cry from her husband as though she were stone deaf to him. "I'll look after you. Perhaps Hesketh will let me off for a time. I'm not going to let you get spoiled. I won't have you rotted up. You're an idealist, Guy. You would only hate Viola if she behaved like a gipsy with you."

"My dear Margaret!" said Viola. "There's no one less like a gipsy than me."

"It wouldn't be so bad if she married you properly," said Margaret, "but even that would lead to tragedy. She's not your mate, my dear. There's no bridge between your two minds. She's pagan and you're Christian. So, Guy, you won't go with her, will you? Promise! . . . Promise!"

There was a great pleading in her voice and in her eyes

towards that brother who had been her comrade from nursery days before she married Hesketh.

"Well, it's up to you, Guy," said Viola, with a rather shrill note in her voice. "I don't want to drag you down. My idea was to lift you up and be kind to you. I'm sorry Margaret has a grudge against the Jerninghams. I thought we had all been rather nice to her. I thought it was an honour for any girl to marry father. And I can't see what all the fuss is about, anyhow."

"Let's hear what Guy has got to say," suggested Cyril, judicially.

"I'm asking him," said Viola.

Guy looked white and distressed, and glanced from his sister to Viola as though seeking desperately for some middle way between them.

"It seems a pity to waste the tickets," he said.

He coloured up when Viola gave a mirthful laugh.

"Oh, I wouldn't worry about that," she cried. "Father will pay you back."

"Besides," said Guy, "you're making far too much fuss about it, Margaret. Anybody would think that Viola and I were going clean off the rails."

"Aren't we?" asked Viola, with her appalling candour.

Guy avoided her eyes and a little moisture broke out on his forehead.

"I don't see why we shouldn't do a tramp together," he said. "I don't see why we shouldn't behave ourselves decently."

"Let us define our terms," said Viola. "Let us be perfectly honest with ourselves, Guy. No hedging! There's no knowing what might happen in those little French inns."

"And in any case," said Guy, "the whole thing's arranged and I'm going through with it. Where Viola goes, I go—and that's all there is about it. We're all talking pretty straight, aren't we? It seems to be the habit in this family! Well,

then, you know what passion means. It has got me all ends up, as far as Viola is concerned. It's no use hiding the fact, is it? It has been pretty obvious for a long time, I should say! . . . But I can't see where the tragedy comes in, Margaret. Honestly."

"Oh, Guy!" cried Margaret. She burst into tears and left the supper-table and went out of the room, followed immediately by Hesketh, who put his arm about her, and said, "My dear, my dear!"

In the dining-room Viola laughed teasingly at Guy, who had a miserable and beaten look.

"For an ardent lover on the eve of romance and adventure, I must say you look pretty rotten," she remarked. "It's not too late to draw back, my little one! I should hate to travel with a tortured conscience lagging on behind."

"Oh, damn my conscience!" said Guy.

"It's damned, my lad," said Cyril quietly. "Circe has put her spell upon you. You'll never be the same bright lad again. As for you, my beauty, you ought to be put in a convent and locked up. Even then you'd play the devil over the garden wall if any good-looking lout passed by. You ought to be burnt as a witch."

"And you ought to be operated on for a lack of pituitary," said Viola sweetly. "I always thought there was something the matter with you. . . . Come on, Guy, help me pack up. I shan't take more than strict necessities."

She led him by the hand to her bedroom upstairs, and after they had gone, Cyril settled down to a book he was reading. It was *The Confessions of St. Augustine.*

L

MARGARET had a quarrel with Hesketh that night —their first real quarrel since their wedding-day— and he had gone downstairs dreadfully hurt to sleep on the sofa. He had argued with her very patiently for an hour or more, but quite obstinately in spite of his patience. He could see no harm in that walking tour—no harm at all. Viola and Guy would get to know each other. Viola was a child of the new age—absolutely frank, absolutely straight, and very high-minded.

"Utterly non-moral," said Margaret. "Pagan in every instinct of her mind and body. You know it, Hesketh. You taught her to be so."

"Essentially pure," said Hesketh. "As clean and clear as crystal. You see how she insisted on telling us, whereas your brother wanted to sneak off caddishly, to avoid a row. . . . Besides, why make a fuss about a boy and girl going for a holiday together? Good heavens, we're not living in the time of Queen Victoria of awful memory. Who dares say that anything whatever is going to happen beyond some intimate talks and a kiss or two?"

"Hesketh, you're a biologist," said Margaret angrily. "You're only lying when you say a thing like that. You know perfectly well what passion is."

He didn't like that word lying. He had dedicated himself to truth and it was the first time he had ever been accused of falsity. Even in the gloom of their bedroom over the dressing-table she saw him go pale and put his hand to his heart as though she had stabbed him.

"Supposing the worst happens," he said, "what Wimbledon would call the worst, which is the mating of two love

birds? What then? And why not? They will make their nest later on. In this house. They can be married in a cathedral, if you like, with organs playing, and all the mob to stare at them, if that's what you want. Personally I call that an indecent way of getting married. I prefer privacy —on a walking tour—with no sniggering neighbours. Viola is quite right."

That was at the end of their argument—a repetition of the same thing said in different ways.

Margaret was in her dressing-gown. She had waited late for him, listening to the drone of his voice in Viola's bedroom after Guy had gone to his own room and slammed the door. She went to her dressing-table as though tired of talking, and began to brush her hair while Hesketh stood irresolute, staring at the carpet, deeply troubled. But suddenly her control left her, and she dropped the hair brush and turned round with a flame in her eyes.

"Hesketh," she said, "I warn you. If you let Viola go with Guy you'll be sending me away. If you believe in immorality, I will be immoral too. I'm only a girl like Viola. Not much older. What will you say if I behave according to your Age of Reason? You once told me I was as free as air if ever I got tired of you. I was to 'hop off,' you said. Very well then, I'll hop off! I won't stay in this house if you let Viola go off with Guy."

"My dear child!" exclaimed Hesketh. "Your nerves have gone all wrong. You're talking undiluted nonsense, and you've hurt me most frightfully. First you call me a liar, and then you threaten to leave me. You're hysterical, my darling."

"I'm trying to save Guy," she said. "I'm sorry I ever brought him here—to this house of science with all this biology—and Behaviourism—and beastliness. First you destroyed my faith in God, and now you're destroying my brother's soul. Very well, if that happens, I won't be loyal to you. If Guy goes wrong, I'll go wrong."

She wept suddenly with passion, and when he came to her and tried to put his arms about her she thrust him away with both hands.

It was then that he went away from her, downstairs, to sleep on the sofa, this middle-aged scientist who had married a girl more than twenty years younger than himself and now felt as hurt as a young boy after the first quarrel of his married life.

She crept out of her room and went down the passage and tapped at Guy's door, but either he was asleep or would not answer her. She sobbed in her lonely bed that night, and was sleeping when Guy and Viola stole out of the house after an early breakfast, carrying their bags down the drive to the first bus that passed the gate.

Hesketh kissed Viola on both cheeks and patted Guy on the back.

"Have a good time," he said, "don't get into trouble, you two vagabonds!"

He waved to them from the doorstep as they turned at the gate. Viola was looking gay and excited, and adventurous. There was laughter in her eyes, and she carried her bags lightly as though she did not feel their weight. Guy was serious and pale, and lagged a little behind his lady.

LI

MARGARET left her husband's house at eleven o'clock that morning, taking a little handbag with her. Hesketh had come up after breakfast and had tapped at her door, but she kept it locked and did not answer him. Then he had gone to his laboratory and was there with the door shut when she came downstairs. From Mrs. Squeede she learnt that Master Cyril had gone off to King's College in a great hurry and had only eaten one egg after his porridge. Mrs. Squeede thought it rather "queer" that Miss Viola and Master Guy should steal off so sudden like without giving her a chance of packing their things, but then she had given up being surprised at anything when it came to Miss Viola.

"You're looking headachey, my dear," said Mrs. Squeede. "Would you like me to make you a nice cup of beef tea?"

No, Margaret didn't want any beef tea. And she wouldn't be back that night. She was going up to Town for a few days.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Mrs. Squeede. "Whatever will the master do without you, now Miss Viola has gone off like that. I hope it isn't your pa that's ill?"

It was difficult to get rid of Mrs. Squeede—poor old Squeaky, as they called her. Things seemed "queer" to her. Some dark suspicion clouded her faithful soul. She had been shocked that morning to find Hesketh asleep on the drawing-room sofa, and had not been satisfied by his plausible explanation of "working late." Something had gone wrong with the family who had depended upon her since their babyhood—for two generations—to keep them in health and happiness. All their science would not have done that unless

she had nursed them through infant ailments and looked after their underclothing and fed them up. It was hard on Mrs. Squeede, as on all faithful servants, that the family should hide their secrets in times of crisis. She wondered if the master and mistress had had a "tiff." Margaret saw her wondering and invented some excuse for getting her out of the room, while she tried to write a letter to Hesketh.

She was desperately angry with him. She would never forgive him for taking Viola's side and giving her money to go away with Guy. She was still more angry with Viola, who was trying deliberately to smash Guy's innocence and idealism with a laughing immorality. She would play with him like a pretty savage and then break his heart. It was all Hesketh's fault for bringing her up like that, without any kind of religion or spiritual consciousness. She was the child of his Age of Reason, and he could not blame her for following his ideas.

Margaret's marriage had been a ghastly mistake. She saw that now. First Hesketh had broken down her own faith, and now Viola was spoiling Guy. She had been unhappy in this house ever since Mr. Jerningham had been rejuvenated and then had frightened her so much the night he died. That was why her baby had been born dead. She hated Hesketh's science and all his ideas, and now she felt that she hated him, too, because he had laughed her faith away and left her helpless against her own temptations. Well, it was his fault again if she lost her soul—though he didn't believe in souls. She knew exactly what she was going to do. She was going to Audley Instone who desired her so much, as she knew in her heart, and she was going to say, "Take me, my dear. I've finished with my middle-aged husband. He won't worry if I go away with you. He believes in the Age of Reason, so we may as well be reasonable, because you and I are young and want each other." She was perfectly calm about it. She wasn't at all hysterical. . . . Perfectly calm, though a sudden rush of tears blinded her eyes for a few minutes.

Not at all hysterical, though just for a little while she wanted to go to Hesketh's door and fling herself against it and cry, "Hesketh, my dear! Don't let me go! I'm frightened, Hesketh—frightened of myself."

She sat there in the breakfast-room, at the desk by the window, with her head drooping over the notepaper on which she was trying to write to Hesketh, telling everything to him so that he would understand. After half an hour she wrote only one line.

"DEAR HESKETH,
"I can't forgive you about Guy. I'm going away.
"MARGARET."

She put this note in an envelope and propped it up against a jar of tobacco on the mantelpiece. It was while Mrs. Squeede was in the kitchen that she went upstairs to get the handbag into which she had put a few of her things. For a few moments she stood quite still in that bare bedroom to which Hesketh had brought her after their honeymoon. It had struck her as very cheerless at first, but she had been happy here until her baby had been born dead and something had seemed to break in her spirit. . . . Hesketh had left his razor unwiped on the washstand—he was always so careless about things like that. It must have lain there since yesterday and she hadn't noticed it the night before because she was crying so much. It would get all rusty, and then he would swear because it was blunt! . . . It was absurd for a wife who was leaving her husband to wipe his razor before she went. But she did so without noticing this absurdity. . . .

She tried not to cry in a third-class carriage on the way up to Town, but an elderly man in gold-rimmed glasses kept watching her over his copy of *The Times,* and she was distressed because she had only brought one handkerchief. She left her bag in the cloak-room at the station.

LII

A WAITING-ROOM in the Foreign Office is not a good place for a meeting between lovers, or for the revelation of a passionate heart. From a sentimental point of view it was a mistake of Margaret's to call there before midday and ask for Mr. Audley Instone. Those who believe in spiritual guidance in moments of tremendous crisis may say that she was led there as an act of grace, and others, less simple in faith, may smile at this jest of chance which took her to such a place when she was in a dangerous mood of self-surrender and self-pity. If on that morning of mental distress she had met Audley in some quiet wood, or even in some private room where she could have flung herself weeping into his arms, she might have betrayed those spiritual instincts which, by some strange paradox, had urged her to leave her husband for conscience' sake. Audley had been her ideal of that romantic youth which she had sacrificed for a marriage with middle age. He had come to her in dreams when she was in weak health. She had loved his friendship and had been a little tempted by it when she was lonely in that house at Wimbledon. Now she had come to him emotionally and childishly, as a kind of challenge to her husband's philosophy of life. She was going to take Hesketh at his word by giving herself to Audley. How would Hesketh like that? How would he square it with his ideas about free love and liberty? Audley was to be made the victim of her desperate indignation with Hesketh and Viola. . . .

But a waiting-room in the Foreign Office is not adapted to such passionate episodes. The whole system of the Civil

Service discourages adventures of the heart and emotional crises. The hall porter, who was a most respectable man, gazed at her sternly, as though suspecting evil intentions, and demanded to know if she had an appointment with Mr. Instone. When she admitted that she had no appointment, he looked even more severe, and showed a moral disapproval which was very chilling.

"I'm a private friend of his," she explained.

"This is the Foreign Office, miss," he said, as though she might have mistaken it for the Coliseum or the Burlington Arcade or some place where ladies made rendezvous with their gentlemen. Then he relented and jerked his thumb in the direction of the central stairway and said, "First floor, Room 13. You'll have to fill up a form."

In Room 13—unlucky number!—she filled up a form and paused at the words "State business." It was impossible to state her business. She could not say, "Mrs. Hesketh Jerningham desires Mr. Audley Instone to take her away." She wrote "Private," and was stricken with sudden panic. Whatever could she say to Audley if he came to see her? What did she want to say? She was behaving like a mad creature. Audley would think she had taken leave of her senses, and he would be perfectly right. And yet she hadn't the strength of mind to tell the messenger boy who waited while she filled up the form that after all she didn't want to see Mr. Instone and that she was sorry to have troubled him.

That boy was sucking an acid tablet which he had taken out of a paper bag in his jacket pocket while he eyed her with a cheeky smile as though he liked her style.

"You'll have to wait," he said. "We're rather busy this morning."

For a moment she thought he might offer her one of his acid tablets, but he pulled up a straight-backed chair and left her alone in a small room with a table covered with black oilcloth on which there was a writing-pad and inkpot and the cross-nibbed pen with which she had filled up the form.

She sat down in the straight-backed chair and stared at the blotting paper. She had run away from Hesketh! After all his love and devotion to her, she had run away from him like a silly girl in a cheap novel. It was because Viola had gone off with Guy on a walking tour. That would sound very silly to Audley. He might not see anything in it all. She couldn't explain to him all the conflict in her mind, her terror lest Guy should be spoiled and smirched. She couldn't tell him that she had been struggling with religious doubts and trying to find some anchor of faith, that this was really the last defeat in a losing battle against Hesketh's ideas which denied the spiritual side of life and the code of morality which had kept her loyal to him. She couldn't say that she had come to him in self-surrender in order to prove that Hesketh was all wrong about his ideas of liberty. There was no sense in any of those arguments. They didn't fit together. If she believed in the moral code or the spiritual life, she ought not to leave Hesketh. If she hated Viola for dragging Guy down from her ideal of him, she ought not to play the faithless wife. And if she did take Hesketh at his word and accept his premise that she was "as free as air," then it was absurd of her to disapprove of Viola's pagan way of love or to hate Hesketh's philosophy of life. She was in a hopeless tangle. She was hideously bewildered. She was shipwrecked in a leaky boat without a rudder or a life-belt. If only God would help her now! Surely if God were pitiful for His creatures—if there were any God—He would come to her guidance in this hour of weakness. What was the good of prayer if it were never answered? She prayed little desperate prayers, walking about that room, leaning her forehead against the window, clasping her hands on the dusty mantelshelf.

But it was not God who opened the door of the Foreign Office waiting-room. It was an elegant young man who came in suddenly, so that she had hardly time to blink her tears away.

"So sorry," he said brightly. "Mr. Instone is with the Chief. I'm afraid he may be another ten minutes or so."

"Perhaps I had better go," answered Margaret hurriedly. "It doesn't really matter. It's nothing of importance."

Nothing more important than the future of her life and all her chance of happiness or wretchedness.

"Oh, not more than ten minutes," said the young man persuasively. "The Chief is bound to go to his lunch before long."

He smiled and showed some very nice teeth, and then left her alone again in that depressing little room, where the heels of many visitors who had been kept waiting had worn a hole through the oilcloth in front of the fire-place, and where there was a faint smell of disinfectant, as though they might bring in dangerous germs from countries deficient in sanitation.

It was twenty minutes before Audley came, and they seemed like several hours to Margaret. They were long enough to let her mind wander back through all her life, like a drowning woman, from those early days when she and Guy had been children in the nursery together and then had grown up as boy and girl, very dependent upon one another, with a sentimental hero-worship on her side of Guy's idealism about life and art and beauty. It was her amazing marriage that had broken that comradeship, and it was Viola who had taken first place in his heart. From the first she had been afraid of Viola because of her wild grace. And gradually she had been frightened by Hesketh's denial of religion, because she was aware of her own weakness and her spiritual need for something which his science could not give her. If her father had had any convictions, she might have clung to some kind of faith, but he was on Hesketh's side really, if he believed anything at all. She had been spiritually alone, and now she was lost. . . . She was going to drag down Audley, just as Viola was going to drag down Guy. And she was worse than Viola because she was a married woman, and

had been brought up decently to believe at least in a moral code. God hadn't answered her prayers. She felt herself slipping—slipping into sin—through sheer weakness.

The door opened, and Audley came in, immaculately dressed in a black morning coat with a white slip to his waistcoat, and striped trousers and grey spats. He gave her one shy glance, and looked embarrassed, she thought, because of this visit to his office. And at the sight of him a wave of colour swept into her face and she was frightened of her own foolishness, her wickedness, as she now saw it, suddenly, with clear eyes, no longer blinded by false sentiment and anger against Hesketh and self-pity. She would rather kill herself than tempt Audley against his sense of honour. She would be tortured for ever more if she behaved like a little slut to this boy who had been so decent to her. She knew that one word from her would break down his self-control. It was only his sense of honour, some code of playing the game which made him pretend that there was nothing more than friendship between them. She had seen the hungry look in his eyes sometimes. He had wanted to kiss her as she had known many times, though she had hidden the knowledge from herself, but he had only kissed the tips of her fingers, with a pose of affectation. She had come here deliberately to seduce him from his own code, and now she hated herself as a vile little creature. She must have been quite mad. Perhaps Viola was right about that horrible Behaviourism which made people act as though there were no such thing as free will. She had been dragged here by some desire stronger than her will-power, overwhelming her reason by some flood of weak and soppy sentiment. Now she was sane again. Perhaps her prayers had been answered after all. She would rather tear her tongue out than say one word to let him guess why she had sent for him to this little room. So her thoughts raced through her mind in that second of time which it took Audley to close the door behind him and come towards her.

"I'm most frightfully sorry," he said. "The Chief is in one of his cantankerous moods. . . . How jolly of you to come!"

He took her hand and raised it to his lips and then laughed shyly at this affectation which had always been a joke between them.

She was tempted to weep and say, "Audley, I've run away from Hesketh. I'm frightfully unhappy. I want your love, my dear." But her smile looked very natural and her voice was quite calm and steady.

"It was silly of me. Just a sudden idea. I expect you're frightfully busy!"

"Oh, I'm only a sort of glorified office boy," he told her. "Do sit down for a moment—until my telephone bell rings again."

She sat down, after he had dusted the chair for her with a very nice silk handkerchief from his breast pocket, which was quite unnecessary as she had been sitting there for half an hour. He himself sat on the edge of the table, swinging one leg, and talking to hide his shyness of her. Pretty ladies did not come to the Foreign Office as a rule.

"I'm looking forward tremendously to seeing you in the South of France. You and Viola will be there in time for the mimosa and the orange harvest. My people say the weather is perfect."

It would be nice to be with Audley in the South of France. His people had a villa near Cannes. They motored over sometimes to Monte Carlo, and they had a yacht which went for trips along the Mediterranean. She had been longing for that adventure with Viola, and had imagined herself sitting on a white deck under a starlit sky, with Audley and pleasant people. It would have been such a change from Hesketh's house of science. Now she knew that she would never have that adventure. It would be far too dangerous for a silly little sentimentalist who had lost her sense of loyalty, and all spiritual guidance. Viola would be there with Guy. . . .

"When are you going, Audley?"

She asked the question as though it were the object of her visit, and most important.

"As a matter of fact I'm motoring down next week," he told her. "Straight through from Calais. I suppose you and Viola couldn't join me at short notice like that? It would be marvellous if you could! We could have a look at things on the way. Chartres, Avignon, all sorts of interesting places."

It was a great temptation. It would have been splendid to go through France with Audley, never to come back to Wimbledon. She felt herself slipping just for one moment of dreadful weakness.

"I'm afraid not," she answered quietly. "To tell you the truth, Audley, Viola is on her way already. She has gone off with Guy on a walking tour before staying with your people. I'm rather worried about it. I don't quite know what is going to happen to them."

Audley raised his eyebrows and smiled.

"Need anything happen?"

Margaret tried to answer his smile, not to make too much of this thing which had worried her so frightfully that she had lost her head about it. She hid the distress in her eyes.

"Viola is so—untamed."

"She is very amusing," said Audley, laughing at his remembrance of her. "So extraordinarily gay and vital."

Margaret nodded. She didn't want to spoil his idea of Viola, or to say anything harsh or cruel. She had no right to now, after this morning and her own folly.

"I'm rather anxious," she said. "Guy has fallen in love with her, and she won't marry him until she's quite sure they're suited to each other. So they've gone away together—to find out!"

Audley gave a little whistle of amazement and then a light-hearted laugh.

"Oh, Lord! These contemporaries of ours! . . . There's

no keeping pace with them. . . . But I thought Guy was a mediævalist."

"He's changed," said Margaret. "Viola has made him—different."

Perhaps he noticed the break in her voice, for he glanced at her for a moment with sudden sympathy.

"No use worrying!" he said. "Guy and Viola are old enough to look after themselves, aren't they? They're not like the Babes in the Wood."

"Are any of us old enough to look after ourselves?" asked Margaret.

She knew that she wasn't. Unless there was some outside help, or some spiritual law in her soul, it would be impossible to resist temptation. Even Cyril was right about that. He had told Hesketh that he regretted his unbelief, his utter lack of discipline.

Audley considered the question with a little smile playing about his lips.

"Most of us are pretty weak," he said. "I know I am! 'Allah is great but juxtaposition is greater.' I forget what cynic said that. Perhaps tradition, and one's social code are what make most of us keep within limits. *Verboten*. . . . Keep off the grass. . . . No thoroughfare. . . . Very useful sign-boards, I suppose, though an awful nuisance sometimes. Of course, you don't need these little safeguards. You were born good as well as beautiful!"

He smiled down upon her as he sat there on the edge of the table, swinging one leg in its well-creased trouser.

She shook her head and answered in a low voice:

"That's not true, Audley. I'm not very beautiful, but I'm very wicked. Fearfully weak, Audley."

"You're one of our saints," he told her. "Virtue comes out of you."

She felt herself weakening again. If they went on talking like this she would break down and cry and blurt out all her distress and let him see her frailty.

He stood up from the table and walked a little away from her to play a moment with the tassel of the window-blind. When he faced her again he avoided looking at her directly and spoke rather nervously, with a shy laugh in his voice.

"Your friendship has meant an awful lot to me. It made me see what a rotter I am—such a hopeless hedonist. There were one or two girls—still, that's another story. What I want to say is that I've felt you to be a kind of spiritual influence in a naughty world. The lady with the lamp! Someone I could reverence as the ideal woman. It's rather absurd saying so, but I thought perhaps you might think sometimes that I was trying to make love to you in a caddish sort of way. I'd hate you to think that, especially as I have a great respect for that scientific husband of yours. I'm not such a cad as all that, and you needn't be afraid that I shall make an ass of myself when you come to stay with us in the South of France. At least, not that sort of ass, though God knows—"

He ended with a laugh, as though he had made rather a fool of himself anyhow by getting this speech off his chest.

"Oh, Audley!" said Margaret. This time, for a moment, her eyes were wet with tears. She was strangely touched by this homage to her as his ideal of womanhood. It made her feel ashamed and guilty. After that she could never tell him what had been in her heart, though at the moment she was terribly tempted to make confession. If only she had given him a different answer in the tea-shop at Oxford when he had pleaded with her to break with Hesketh! Fate had meant him to be her lover. God or Something had played a joke on her when she had married a middle-aged biologist instead of Audley who had come to her in dreams.

She held her hands out to him, and he came forward to take hold of them. Perhaps if he had touched her hands, if he had felt them tremble in his own, if he had looked into her eyes and seen her yearning, he might have guessed the things she had tried to hide. But God—or Something—let

us keep to Margaret's own way of thought—intervened at that very moment. Or Chance, the Jester, made a mock of this young man and woman. Perhaps that boy with a paper bag of acid tablets in his pocket was a messenger of those mysterious powers which decide the fate of human lives, although he drew his pay from the Foreign Office in Whitehall, and came by tram from Brixton. He bounced in rather breathlessly, after a fight with a fellow-messenger boy in an empty waiting-room.

"Beg pardon, sir. You're wanted by Sir Alban. He's just telephoned to Mr. Jaffray, sir."

"Confound it!" said Audley, angrily.

"Certainly, sir. I'll tell Mr. Jaffray."

The boy winked slightly at Margaret and retired cheerfully to the place whence he came.

"I'm desperately sorry," said Audley. "The Chief is fussed about Czechoslovakia. There's a bit of a crisis and the wires are humming with messages—which I have to decode, alas! . . . When can I see you again?"

"Not before you go abroad," said Margaret.

"Oh, Lord! . . . Well—*a rivederla, Signora!* I'm longing for this time three weeks, with you and Viola! We'll have a wonderful time."

"Good-bye," she said.

He took her gloved hand and held it for a moment.

Then the door opened again, and the elegant young man appeared, looking rather anxious. It was probably Mr. Jaffray.

"So sorry!" he said. "The Chief—"

"Coming!" answered Audley.

He gave a quick smile at Margaret, and left her hurriedly. Some incident in Czechoslovakia, or a misspelt code, had, perhaps, altered the course of two lives and—who knows?—saved a woman's soul. At least her peace of mind.

The hall porter nodded amiably to Margaret as she left the Foreign Office, and did not see the rush of tears to her

eyes as she went blindly through the swing-door. She had said good-bye to Audley, her lover. She had been saved from shipwreck. God—or Something—had answered her prayers. Audley's belief in her goodness had kept her from going bad. That messenger boy had appeared at the nick of time. That Foreign Office waiting-room, with its shabby oilcloth, had been the worst—or the best—place possible for this emotional visit. And now, not uplifted by any sense of spiritual victory, but feeling rather cold and broken, she was going back to Wimbledon.

Mrs. Squeede was glad to see her back to lunch. The master was still in his laboratory. Margaret's letter was still propped up against the tobacco jar on the dining-room mantelpiece. She threw it into the fire and watched it burn.

LIII

BRIGHT little postcards arrived from Viola, addressed more or less alternatively to Hesketh and Margaret. *"Having a great time. . . . These Roman remains look as if they had been built the day before yesterday. . . . Guy and I walked for twenty miles to-day. . . . The women of Arles are pure Roman. Guy has been sketching some of them. . . . Guy has sprained his off side fetlock. We shall have to go to Avignon by train. . . . Visited the Palace of the Popes. Not very thrilling. . . . Find I am very pagan in spirit. Danced the Spring Song before the Temple of Diana. Guy shocked. . . . Drank too much red wine at the Hotel de la Reine Jeanne at Les Baux. Guy shocked again. . . . Vastly enjoyed a visit to Tarascon, and saw the living image of dear old Tartarin. Guy didn't come owing to a heated argument about life in which I failed to agree with him! . . . Met Audley in Avignon yesterday. Surprised and delighted! He suggests that we make use of his car for the rest of the trip, and offers himself as chauffeur and travelling companion. What could be nicer? Especially as Guy has given at the ankles. . . . Staying at Avignon two more days. Audley very civil. Hopes we won't think he wants to 'barge in.' . . . Guy rather fed up with Audley. Personally I like his sunny smile. . . . We are off to Hyères to-morrow on the way to Cannes. Hope you—Margaret—are coming along next week. Audley has invited Guy to join the merry party, with a bedroom all to himself (tell Cyril!)."*

Hesketh made only brief comments when these postcards arrived, every two days or so. He was reserved and embarrassed about this walking tour of Viola's since Margaret had quarrelled with him that night, and she saw him glance at

her now and then, apprehensively. He tried rather obviously by endearments and affectionate words to make amends for his consent to Viola's adventure. She noticed also that he did not work so late, but came to sit with her in the evenings, reading *The Times* or listening-in to Cyril's wireless set. Perhaps her own behaviour was the cause of this alteration in his habits. He must have seen that she had gone through an emotional crisis that morning she had come back to lunch. Not all the hot water in the taps, nor the powder on her dressing-table, could hide the traces of her tears, and she had given herself away a little by putting her head against his shoulder and saying, "Sorry for my wild words last night, Hesketh! Women go mad sometimes, don't they?" It was very good of him to pretend that he had failed to hear any wild words, and that one woman, who happened to be his wife, was very wise and wonderful.

It was only when Viola mentioned for the second time on one of her postcards that Guy had been shocked that Margaret revealed her anxiety again and had a talk with Hesketh on a subject which both had deliberately avoided for more than two weeks. It was at the breakfast-table, when Hesketh was lingering over his coffee and reading his newspaper after Cyril had made his usual bolt for Town. He handed over the picture postcard, after glancing at the pencilled scrawl with a glint of amusement, and Margaret had read it several times, as though by re-reading this message she might get to know more of what was happening between Guy and Viola.

"Drank too much red wine at the Hotel de la Reine Jeanne at Les Baux. Guy shocked again."

"Hesketh," said Margaret, "I'm getting worried again about Guy and Viola. I'm sorry to bother you about it."

He put his newspaper down, with a faint sigh, and then smiled at her.

"No bother. . . . What's worrying you, sweetheart?"

She stared out of the window of the breakfast-room as though seeing as far as the South of France, although she

did not see the City men hurrying to catch electric trains, nor the butcher's young man propping his bicycle against the gate-post before calling for orders, nor even an audacious robin hopping on the window-sill to get the crumbs which Cyril had put out.

"I'm afraid those two aren't getting on very well," she said.

"Viola keeps saying that Guy is shocked. I think they're quarrelling, Hesketh."

"Is that very dreadful?" he asked good-humouredly. "I thought you were afraid they might get to like each other too much. Young love! Passionate episodes!"

He just didn't understand what was passing in her mind. He was quite blind to her point of view. How could she make him understand when he thought everything that Viola did was perfect, and was quite oblivious of any danger to the boy who was with her?

"Hesketh," she said, "I don't want to talk high morality or anything like that. I haven't the right to—knowing my own weakness. I mean, I've come to understand things more and make allowances. But surely you must see that Guy and Viola might ruin themselves for life. It might lead to a dreadful tragedy."

He raised his "horners"—and his eyebrows—frankly startled.

"How?" he asked. "What sort of tragedy?"

She felt her way towards the truth as she saw it. She didn't want to exaggerate, or make a scene, or blurt out fears that might be purely imaginary. But she couldn't see Hesketh sitting there over his newspaper morning after morning, utterly unconscious that Viola and Guy might be walking towards a precipice.

"My dear," she said, "you know what love it, especially between a boy and girl. Guy was passionate for Viola. It's not possible that they have kept at arm's length all this time,

like brother and sister, or two bored old people. Imagine them sitting together outside the little cafés in Provence, talking intimately, feeling romantic, holding each other's hands in the darkness when they walk out after dinner, saying good night to each other in the passage of an old French inn—after drinking too much red wine."

Hesketh laughed with shining eyes.

"Lord!" he said. "It sounds good, all that. You and I must go to Provence, sweetheart, and have a second honeymoon. Why should Guy and Viola have all the fun? Confound those two!"

She would never make him understand. He refused to face the elementary truth of life, although he was a scientist and searched out facts. He was blind to the moral side of things.

"Yes, but afterwards, Hesketh. What's going to happen if Viola quarrels with Guy after she has let him love her? Supposing she decided that she's had enough of him by the time she gets to Cannes, and makes up her mind that they don't agree with each other and that Guy gets shocked too easily, and that marriage would be a great mistake?"

He thought over that situation and didn't seem to think much of it.

"It would be a pity," he decided. "I should be sorry in a way. But it would be much better than a marriage which *was* a great mistake! Don't you think so, dear heart?"

She didn't think so, having run away from a marriage which she had thought a great mistake and come back again because of loyalty and other things.

"How about Guy?" she asked. "Doesn't he matter at all?"

"Good Lord, yes!" said Hesketh. "But if they don't get on with each other—"

"And how about Viola?" she asked, ignoring his answer to her first question. "She won't be the same after her experiment with Guy. There are some men who would hate to

know about it, if they ever fell in love with her. They like love fresh, as I came to you, Hesketh, untouched. Don't you understand now what I mean—and why I'm afraid?"

No, not even then did he understand, or, anyhow, agree.

"Society will have to readapt itself," he said, as though speaking professorially to a class of students. "We shall have to reshape our minds on these subjects. When we reach the Age of Reason—"

"Hesketh!" she cried, half laughing and half crying, "if you bring in the Age of Reason I shall scream!"

For a moment he looked very much hurt by this scorn, this hysterical laughter at his hope for the future. Then he came over to her and put his arm round her waist.

"You're worrying yourself about nothing at all," he said. "Those young people are having a jolly good time, and they'll come back as happy as homing birds to build a nest here."

Well, that was that. It was no good arguing with Professor Hesketh Jerningham. He had made up his mind about life.

It was a great relief to Margaret's anxiety when Viola sent those postcards saying that Audley had met them in Avignon, and that they were travelling about with him. He was a "conventionalist," as he called himself, and his company would restrain Viola from some of her wilder flights. He would be a safeguard to Guy.

Margaret felt happier when that news came, but it caused a little scene with Hesketh, because it reminded him that she had promised to stay with Audley and his people, and he wanted to know what day she was going.

"I'm not going," she told him. "I'm not going to leave you alone, Hesketh. It wouldn't be fair."

"Oh, but I insist!" he exclaimed. "I shall hate it like poison when you go, but I'm not as selfish as all that. You get away, my dear, and have a good time. Goodness knows you deserve it."

"No," she said stubbornly. "I'm staying with you. Later

on you and I will go away together and have that second honeymoon."

She was insincere, perhaps. Not even to herself did she admit that having come back to Wimbledon she had better stay there instead of going out to sunshine, and blue skies, and glamorous nights, and Audley. She thought of that cynical line he had quoted, "Allah is great but juxtaposition is greater." She would be loyal to Audley's ideal of her, and take no risks. And anyhow she wouldn't leave Hesketh alone, poor dear—though once she had nearly done so on a morning of emotion.

LIV

DURING those weeks when Guy and Viola were away Margaret looked up some of her old friends to keep her from brooding during lonely hours, and she found Betty Winter best as a mental tonic. It was curious that in any crisis of her life she went to Betty for advice and help, and self-revelation, although their characters were utterly different. It was because she faced life with such courage and candour, and had the gift of friendship without selfishness. Little by little, not without one break-down, Margaret told her about that morning when she had decided to leave Hesketh and had gone up to Audley's office in a state of ridiculous emotion. And then the whole story came out about Guy and Viola, and her sense of spiritual desolation, and her disagreement with Hesketh's views of life.

"Very awkward!" said Betty thoughtfully. "Still, I must say it doesn't surprise me very much, having eyes in my head and some acquaintance with human nature and Mrs. Hesketh Jerningham. The truth is, Margaret, my dear, you're one of those people who need religion and can't do without it. There are some people like that still left in this unfaithful age. Personally I'm entirely immune from religious instincts, although I sometimes feel the need of some driving purpose higher than the little futilities of this unmeaning life. That's why people like war now and then. It takes them out of themselves and gives them a terrific impulse of self-sacrifice and service. That's why the passion of love is such a lure. It seems to give a meaning to life."

"Doesn't it?" asked Margaret.

"For a week or two, no doubt," said Betty, with smiling cynicism.

Margaret was in Betty's rooms in West Kensington. Betty's mother had gone off—by good luck—to stay with a friend at Mentone. They were alone together, as they had been so often in those days at Somerville, with a good red fire in the grate and a low deep chair in which Betty had room to stretch her legs. It was good to have a friend like this to whom one could speak without mental reservations.

"Don't you believe in loyalty?" asked Margaret, presently. "I mean, isn't it the better part of love, when passion has gone? I want to be loyal to Hesketh. I should hate myself frightfully if I were ever disloyal—which I nearly was."

Betty agreed on loyalty up to a point. But not if two souls suffered torture because of some false ideal of loyalty. She was a modernist about that.

"If one has any ideals it's torture to be disloyal," said Margaret. "Besides, supposing one's disloyalty broke somebody's heart?"

Betty laughed with real enjoyment and mirth.

"Do modern hearts get broken?" she asked. "Isn't that quite old-fashioned and out of date?"

"Betty, you're a dreadful cynic!" cried Margaret.

Betty denied cynicism. She only watched her contemporaries. She didn't have to trip over broken hearts along the King's Road or High Street, Kensington, although, judging from the papers, there was a lot of infidelity about and thousands of divorces. She thought the modern young woman, like herself, had a fairly strong cardiac action, proof against the assaults of sentiment.

"Of course," she added, "we have our little *crises de cœur* now and then. They seem rather important at the time. Sex plays the devil with our common sense, and we make abject fools of ourselves over some romantic-looking lad who either gets caught or runs away. But we don't fade out and wither like the flowers of spring or Jane Austen's little heroines. We take up golf or badminton, or sublimate our instincts by social service. A far, far better way! Look at

me, for instance—the victim of an unhappy passion for a nice young man who evades me on every possible occasion. Have I lost my appetite? No! Do I sit down and cry my eyes out, or stare morbidly at my bath water? Certainly not! I go to the movies when I get the chance, and laugh at Charlie Chaplin. . . . By the way, how's Cyril?"

Margaret looked at her curiously, and saw that her laughing eyes were shy.

"Betty! Honestly—are you in love with Cyril—or only joking? Tell me, my dear! It's only fair after all my confessions."

It was a moment or two before Betty answered, and for the first time since Margaret had known her she was actually blushing, with a sudden flame in her cheeks.

"I like the lad," she admitted demurely. "But I'm not going to break my heart about him. Especially as he shuns me like the plague."

Margaret took her hand and put her cheek against it.

"Oh, Betty, isn't life awful? We all want something we can't get. It's as though God laughed at us after having made us."

"Yes," said Betty. "If God is whimsical He must get a lot of fun out of us. We're so utterly unreasonable. Such funny little ants, fussing around for no apparent purpose. Still, I'm very fond of life, my dear."

"It's love that makes life so difficult," said Margaret. "Life would be much easier without sex, don't you think?"

"Speaking as a biologist," said Betty, "I'm afraid there wouldn't be any life. That would make things easier still. . . . Order reigns in Moscow—with the dead bodies in the snow. . . . Don't let Cyril think I'm after him like a human tigress. If he would care to come here to tea with you one Saturday afternoon I'd behave like a perfect lady and still my beating heart."

But when Margaret delivered this message, slightly amended, Cyril refused the invitation, brutally.

"That girl is a danger signal. When I see red hair I run. . . . Besides, I'm looking into this God business. It's like a detective story, and I'm getting interested. I'm rather inclined to think there's something in it."

He spoke with dreadful flippancy, but his words startled her.

"Oh, Cyril! Do tell me if you find out anything!"

She spoke as though he might suddenly discover some tremendous clue to the eternal mysteries overlooked hitherto by enquiring minds, and she wondered why he grinned as though she had said something comical.

"You're very young!" he remarked. "You ought never to have married the governor. I've said so before, haven't I?"

"I thought I asked you not to say it, Cyril?"

He did not argue that point. But he seemed to be arguing other points with Hesketh. Night after night lately he and Hesketh had come to bed late after tremendous conversations in the study. Margaret could hear their voices in a distant dialogue down below while she was having her bath. Once the conversation lasted for three hours, having begun at ten o'clock, and she became alarmed and went down in her dressing-gown.

"Aren't you two people coming to bed?" she asked, standing at the study door.

Both of them had become silent and looked startled at her entrance, but she could see that Hesketh was angry and perturbed, and that Cyril looked as though he had been arguing heatedly, judging from the disordered state of his hair. The fire had gone out, but he stood with his back to the fire place, leaning against the mantelshelf with his hands in the pockets of his shabby old jacket. Hesketh was pacing up and down the room, rather pale, almost ludicrously like his own son, except for the difference of age and a slightly haggard look. He stopped pacing up and down when Margaret appeared, and agreed that it was time to go to bed.

"Have you two been quarrelling?" asked Margaret suspiciously, but smiling at these two Jerninghams excited over some scientific argument.

"Only verbally," explained Hesketh. "Though I must say Cyril doesn't observe the amenities of debate."

"Sorry, Dad!" said Cyril, laughing uneasily. "You asked for it, you know!"

"Well—" said Hesketh. He hesitated, and then glanced at his son with a faint smile.

"I don't think we've convinced each other, have we?"

"Let's agree to differ," answered Cyril. "I'm for bed, anyhow. Very foolish, all this rhetoric!"

Upstairs in the bedroom Hesketh still looked perturbed, and sat on the side of his bed with a boot in his hand.

"Extraordinary lad that!" he said. "After all my comradeship and everything I've taught him in the way of science, he has the audacity to tell me I'm dead wrong about almost everything. Tells me that I haven't learnt a damn thing since I took my degree twenty years ago. Says I'm a Neo-Darwinian—as though that were something prehistoric."

"I'm sure he's very proud of you, Hesketh," said Margaret soothingly.

Hesketh dropped his boot and paced up and down the bedroom, just as she had found him pacing up and down his study, but this time in his socks.

"I don't know about being proud of me! All I know is that he challenges my whole philosophy of life. He has got some queer notions about 'personality' and argues that evolution has been directed by spiritual and not material processes. He believes that the world and all that lies within it is a spiritual world and that my theory of heredity is impossible, because the germ plasm couldn't have produced such complex reproductive organisms without a directing intelligence. He jeers at the mechanistic theory of life and says Vitalism is sheer bunk! Also he is pleased to say that it is my material philosophy of life which brought about the

Great War, and that in talking about the Age of Reason without any spiritual authority I have got hold of the dirty end of the stick. That was his phrase, Margaret. The dirty end of the stick!"

"He doesn't mean to be rude," explained Margaret, as one of the younger generation. "It's only the modern way of expression."

It was some time before Hesketh spoke again. He retired into his little dressing-room and she heard him give a deep sigh there. Presently he came back, and spoke bitterly.

"He blames me for bringing up Viola and himself like a couple of savages. . . . After all my love for them! My devotion! He says he's got a grudge against me because I left out God as a mental background—whatever he means by that!"

Margaret knew what he meant by that, but she was sorry for Hesketh. That Cyril should challenge him on that subject was a knife-like wound, close to his heart. She dared not say, "Perhaps he's right, Hesketh! I think he's right." It would have been too cruel then, like saying, "I told you so!" when a man has been mortally wounded after being warned of danger.

Hesketh gave a kind of groan.

"My dear," he said huskily, "I hardly like to tell you one thing that Cyril said. It's the one attack I can't forgive him. It made me very angry. I'm afraid I lost my temper for a moment."

"Tell me," said Margaret.

Hesketh laughed harshly.

"It's ridiculous really! . . . But I never thought my own son—Cyril!—would round on me like that. He said that if I'd had any spiritual sense I wouldn't have married a girl young enough to be my own daughter. He thought it was damned unfair and not playing the game by the younger generation. My son said that! . . . Cyril!"

He broke down a little, and she saw that his eyes were

wet—this professor of biology who had been so sure of life and was preparing the way for the Age of Reason. Margaret was frightened and grief-stricken. She tried to comfort him, and his weakness lasted only for a minute, but he was very hard hit.

LV

SHE noticed that Hesketh and Cyril avoided each other next morning. Hesketh hurried over his breakfast and went to his laboratory, and Cyril came down late and looked hollow-eyed as though he had had a sleepless night. He ate his breakfast moodily and studied the front page of the *Daily Express* with a look of hard contempt for the world's news.

"Anything interesting, Cyril?" asked Margaret in a friendly way.

"Nothing whatever," he said. "As far as I can make out we're preparing for another world war, but that's rather a common-place, isn't it? Is that the marmalade over there?"

It was the marmalade, and she passed it to him.

"Cyril," she said, "you hurt Hesketh most frightfully last night."

His face coloured up a little, but he smiled for the first time since he had come down.

"Is that so? I talked a lot of rot, of course. One does . . . when one talks."

"I'm glad you believe in spiritual things, Cyril, though I don't understand all that about Vitalism and so on . . . All that is quite beyond my poor little brain. . . . But I wish you hadn't said that ridiculous thing about Hesketh being too old to marry me. It isn't true, and I asked you not to. We quarrelled about it once before, Cyril."

"It slipped out," he said. "I admit it was rather caddish."

For some minutes there was silence between them. Cyril studied the *Daily Express* again. At the front door Mrs. Squeede was talking in a shrill voice to the postman who

had brought a parcel. Then Cyril left the table and threw some crumbs out to the birds. An errand boy was whistling "Tea for Two" down the road. Somewhere in the distance a motor-horn sounded the reveille to the traffic of the day.

"All the same," said Cyril, "it's no use blinking the blighted truth, is it? One has to face up to things."

"What truth and what things?" asked Margaret.

"Why," he said, "it's as clear as sunlight that I shall have to clear out of this house for a time. To-day's as good as to-morrow, and perhaps better. The governor and I don't agree."

Margaret felt her heart give a lurch, but she was utterly mystified.

"Clear out!" she said. "Oh, Cyril, why? What's gone wrong? You'd break Hesketh's heart."

"Oh, Lord, no! It may hurt him a bit and I'm sorry about that. But self-preservation is the first law of life. One's immortal soul—I expect you'd say. So I'm going to stay with a friend of mine for a time."

Margaret clasped her hands and put them against her breast.

"Cyril, you can't leave Hesketh. What's your immortal soul got to do with it?"

"I'd hate to tell you," he said with a forced smile. "There are some things that one can't discuss—unless one is like Viola. Silly damn things that rot a man up, unless he gets out of the way of them. I'm getting out of the way. It's much the best plan. Tell the governor I'm grateful for everything, and shan't sponge on him as soon as I can get a job. Perhaps when I've looked round a bit I'll come back again—wearing the white collar of a blameless life."

Margaret went over to him by the window and took hold of his arms.

"Cyril," she said, "I don't understand. What has happened? What's the matter with you? What is it you want to hide? Have you done something you're ashamed of? I

mean—have you got too fond of anyone and tangled yourself up? We're all so weak. Don't be afraid to tell me. I can understand things like that. I'm not narrow-minded. I'm your father's wife, Cyril. Your friendly little stepmother!"

He tried to get away from her, but she held him tight. And then he looked at her with a kind of anger and impatience.

"Well, if you will have it," he said, "it's because you *are* my father's wife that I've got to go. Haven't you seen a thousand times that I love you like a dog and that I hate the governor for having married you? . . . Curse it all!"

Her hands left his arms, and she drew back from him with terror in her eyes, and pity.

"Oh, God!" she said in a whisper. "Oh, my dear! Oh, Cyril!"

She prayed in her heart that it was not her fault. There would be no punishment too bad for her if she had been careless or emotional with this boy, whom she had loved as a sister. How tragic was life! How terrifying! How desperate!

"Don't say anything to father," he said hurriedly. "Best not. And anyhow, it's only a morbid mood of mine. Utterly untrue, really. I shouldn't have said such a thing. I ought to have cut my tongue out, rather than blurt out such damned nonsense. Margaret, don't take it as said. Wash it out of your mind, old girl. I didn't mean a word of it."

He was frightened now, and hated himself because of the fear in her eyes, and the thing he had said.

"I'll stay away for a week or so," he told her. "I'll come back when I've got things straight in my mind. You needn't say anything to the governor."

But by a tragedy of fate there was no need to say anything to Hesketh. He had come back for something. Perhaps he had come back—Margaret never knew—to have a word with Cyril and put it all right with him after that

discussion last night. He had come to the open door when Cyril had blurted out his frightful words and when Margaret had shrunk back from him. He stood there as though turned to stone, dead white, with an agony in his eyes, and they were only aware of him when he spoke.

"You needn't come back, Cyril. . . . I never want to see you again. I— I—"

He staggered slightly, with a hand pressed to his side, and then turned and walked away, and they heard him go into his laboratory at the end of the passage, and shut the door.

LVI

MARGARET felt annihilated by Cyril's revelation and by Hesketh's agony in that laboratory in which he had shut himself up. Several times she crept to the door and listened anxiously but did not hear a sound, and once she tapped at the door and said, "May I come in, Hesketh?" but he did not answer. Cyril had gone off to Town with a white face and moody eyes and had promised to come back that night and "put it all right." He was desperately ashamed of himself for making such a silly ass of himself, as he was pleased to call it, but it was not going to be easy to recall those words which Hesketh had overheard.

After he had gone Margaret brooded over them. She remembered many little incidents now which made her feel pitiful for Cyril and wretched about herself. After Viola had gone away with Guy, and her own folly about Audley, she had clung to Cyril for companionship. She had gone for walks on the Common with him, taking his arm sometimes, or sitting with him while they talked about books or lapsed into long silences for which he had a special gift. Once a few nights ago she had kissed him before going to bed, just as she might have kissed Guy, without thinking anything about it, until he had coloured up rather hotly, as though he didn't like being kissed. Another night they had stayed up late together and she had sat on the hearth-rug before the fire leaning her head against his knees, in a sisterly way, and then had dropped off to sleep like that, until Hesketh had come home from a public dinner surprised to find them waiting up. But it went much further back than that. She had liked Cyril from the moment she had met him on the station platform the morning after her marriage, and because

of his age, and his sense of humour, and his frankness of speech, had found him more companionable now than Hesketh, who was always absorbed in his own work and became a little "professorial" sometimes, even in ordinary conversation.

But she had never dreamt that she was distressing Cyril by her affection. It was inconceivable and frightening. It made her feel afraid of human nature. There were things lurking in life which could hardly bear thinking about, temptations, morbid thoughts, physical and mental weaknesses which surged up in human beings like ugly creatures from some dark underworld, bringing terror and conflict even into love and friendship and family relationship. Even carelessness like hers might lead to misery, yet Hesketh had been so sure of Cyril and Viola! He had been so certain that his way of education had liberated them from the bewilderment of sex which overtook other young people to whom it was all "taboo," as he called it. His system hadn't worked. Here was Cyril with one of those very troubles which Hesketh had jeered at as the disease of "repression," and Viola had tempted Guy to betray his conscience for passion's sake. Hesketh had been all wrong. Everything was all wrong in the Jerningham family—these dear queer people into whose lives she had come as an emotional girl, utterly ignorant of life, alien to all their ideas, trying to keep step with them, yet called back always to some different code of values obsessed by the need of faith which she had weakly given up because of their ridicule and indifference. It was not only the Jerningham family that was all wrong. They had only gone one step ahead of other families—only a little way ahead of Guy and herself who had discussed religion with smiling unbelief and had revolted against their father's pulpit oratory because they had found him out as a sceptic and a hedonist. Betty Winter didn't believe in anything. Even Audley had no faith beyond "playing the game" according to some public-school tradition. That was about as far

as most of her friends went, and the whole world nowadays seemed to have no other law to hold them than some vague allegiance to a social code which only worked when the strain was not too strong. It wasn't enough. She had found herself that it wasn't enough. It was only by some fluke that she had drawn back from disloyalty to Hesketh and hadn't dropped down into the slime of the underworld in her own mind. Because that's where it was—that dark underworld of primitive instinct—in the mind of people like herself, expensively brought up, with every chance of being decent, with traditions behind them and good inheritance, but with that curse of nature in them, those pagan instincts only just kept down by self-control and self-respect as long as life went smoothly. People were giving up religion, but they hadn't found anything else to make life endurable or give a meaning to its miseries and conflicts of desire. Perhaps the only happy people in the world were those who still clung on somehow to faith in the Christian ideal and took self-sacrifice—the Cross—as their way of life. To deny oneself everything, to suffer gladly, to crucify oneself—perhaps that was the only way of escape from desperate unhappiness and hideous regrets, and that evil nature in oneself. But one couldn't do that without faith in a future life. If there were only this life, then the whole thing was a hoax, as Cyril had said one day. Perhaps he was right. She remembered that day when he had stood in the catacombs by the bones of the early Christians and had wondered whether they were "duped," and had suffered in vain for ideas that weren't true. That was a terrible thought. Surely life couldn't be as cruel as all that, with nothing to follow, after all one's struggles? If so, it was no use struggling. In that case Viola was right. To get as much fun as one could, and laugh with a pagan joy, and follow one's instincts, and believe in Behaviourism, until something hit one and spoilt the fun . . . Something was sure to hit one . . . Cyril had been hit. Her own baby had been born dead. Now Hesketh

was hit, by his own son. The fun didn't last very long . . . Faith might be better than fun. The only man she knew who had real faith was Richard Halliday, and he was happier than Cyril or Hesketh or Guy, or her own father. It was rather strange, that. He seemed to have the secret of being happy, though he lived a life of utter self-denial, and had turned his back on comfort and pleasure and beauty. He had crucified his flesh, and lived only for some spiritual ideal. Even if he was wrong about his ideal it gave him peace of mind, and saved him from the agony of desire for a human happiness that seemed always to evade one . . .

Once before Margaret had gone to Richard Halliday for help in that darkness of soul which had overcome her when her baby died, and now when Hesketh was shut up in his study and Cyril had gone off after wild words, and everything seemed to have gone wrong, she thought of going to him again. He seemed to stand in the background of her mind as the alternative to Hesketh's philosophy of Reason. He was utterly unreasonable. He lived by different laws of logic. His faith stood outside the proofs of science. He talked always of the spirit, which seemed more real to him than the everyday world . . .

She went up to Fulham, leaving a note for Hesketh to say she would be back to tea, and begging him to forgive Cyril for words which he didn't mean, which he couldn't possibly mean, because they were utterly and terribly absurd.

This time she knew her way to Linnets' Grove and did not enquire at the greengrocer's shop where the girl was with her baby. But she saw the girl through the open door, serving a woman with vegetables. She was laughing across the counter and looked happy.

The squalor of the street was the same. Its dreariness depressed her spirit again. The poverty of its life was visible and hideous. And yet she knew now that happiness was not made certain by comfort or luxury. Very likely Linnets' Grove had an easier time than Grove Road, Wim-

bledon, with simpler problems, although perhaps there was the same conflict between the two ideals of life. Richard believed there was more spirituality in the slums than in the homes of people like herself—more courage and charity. Anyhow, he had found peace here in self-denial and service.

His landlady called to him again as Margaret stood on the doorstep, and he came out into the hall, surprised this time to see her, not warned by any "telepathic" message. He looked different somehow. She noticed that he was not in clerical clothes, but wore an old blue suit with a soft collar. He seemed to have been cleaning out one of his rooms and had a broom in his hand.

"You look worried," he said, with that quick sympathy which was his special gift. "Anything wrong, Margaret?"

"Everything wrong!" she told him, with an attempt at humour lest she might be foolish and cry.

He thought that sounded like an exaggeration, especially as the sun was shining down Linnets' Grove, and a caged canary was singing in an open window overhead. That canary was a rebuke to pessimism, he said.

He closed the door of his shabby little sitting-room and drew up an arm-chair made in the dark ages of the Victorian era and ingeniously uncomfortable.

"What about a cup of tea?" he asked. "My old witch could make you one in two minutes . . . Or a glass of sherry? I keep it for 'hard luck' cases. You've no idea how it helps in time of trouble!"

He was talking nonsense to put her at her ease or perhaps to hide his own shyness.

"Not even sherry will help in my case," she said. "I'm worried to death, Richard."

"As bad as that? . . . I used to think worry killed—but I'm still alive! Is there anything I can do to help?"

"Something frightful has happened," she told him. "Cyril—my stepson—has fallen in love with me."

He raised his eyebrows and seemed rather amused by this

revelation. At least he answered humorously, refusing to be shocked by a little thing like that.

"That seems natural," he remarked. "Who wouldn't?"

She tried to make him see the tragedy of it, and the desperate situation in that home life at Wimbledon.

"He hates Hesketh because he married me . . . He said terrible things to his own father."

Richard Halliday still refused to believe in the tragedy. Perhaps he was trying to make the best of a bad business for her sake. Lots of boys, he said, were jealous of their own fathers. It didn't mean very much, and was a familiar fact in psychology. "A complex," in the jargon of the day. He didn't think she need worry much about that, and if she used Cyril's admiration of her it would keep him from going off the rails.

"His ideal of you is the best thing in his life. He won't go far wrong as long as he holds on to that."

"I'm afraid of the look in his eyes," said Margaret. "And I'm afraid of all the passionate instincts that make life so —beastly. That's why I've come to see you. I want to get back to religion."

"Oh, Lord!" he said, "I'm no hand as a theologian!"

He didn't believe it was a question of "getting back" very far in her case. He saw a halo round her head already, he said, like St. Cecilia's! That's why he kept her photograph on his mantelpiece, as a spiritual lady in Linnets' Grove.

"You're all wrong about me!" cried Margaret, rather desperately. "I know I look good, but I'm vile really!"

His incredulous laugh rang through the room until he saw her distress and listened very patiently while she told him about her quarrel with Hesketh about Guy and Viola, and her mad visit to Audley and all the conflict in her mind. Once or twice he said "Oh, Lord!" again, especially when she came to the part about Guy and Viola, but he seemed to see something humorous about that visit of hers to the Foreign Office on a morning of emotion.

"I like that fellow, Audley," he said. "He must be rather charming. It's astonishing really how decent men can be without anything to hang on to—nothing more than 'good form.' I dare say he has been suffering the agonies of martyrdom because of his love for you—without the faith of the early Christians. St. Anthony—without convictions! I don't see how it's done. When I was tempted by beauty, more than once, I had to cut and run. I should have been lost if I had dallied with temptation in tea-rooms and dance clubs! . . . Besides, I wore a clerical collar and had a certain amount of faith to keep me straight."

Margaret looked at him in a startled way.

"I don't believe you were ever tempted," she said, incredulously.

"Hellishly!" he answered quickly, as though stung by the remembrance of old conflicts, and then laughed while a slight colour crept into his face, because he had given away his secret.

She glanced again at his delicate face, rather haggard, and care-worn, and ascetic. Perhaps even a man like this had to fight down human nature before he had won his victory of the spirit. She wondered if he had ever suffered the passion and agony of love. Once, as a young, unmarried girl, she had sentimentalised over him. Other girls must have clung about him—some of them pretty ladies who had thought him "so sweet" as her father's curate. But he had cut that sort of thing out of his life. He had crucified himself. He was a white flame in this "dark forest," as he had once called life.

"I'm sorry for the Guys and Violas," he said. "Life seems so amusing—Liberty Hall!—and so safe on the way to magic cities, until they get caught in unexpected traps. Mother Nature is so devilish unfair on them! She pretends she's a fairy godmother with all the gifts of loveliness, when secretly the old hag is luring them on to dangerous adventures—hold-

ing out poisoned gingerbread to all the innocent Babes in the Wood."

"Sometimes I think God is unfair," said Margaret miserably.

Richard Halliday laughed and shook his head.

"Why not the Devil?" he asked.

Margaret agreed that the Devil might have something to do with it.

"Only we don't believe in the Devil nowadays, do we?" she asked. "Intelligent people, I mean."

He smiled again at this question.

"Don't we? . . . I do! . . . I still bear the marks of his claws."

He pointed to the crow's-feet about his eyes, too deeply etched for a man of his age.

Anyone who went through the war, he thought, had had a close-up view of the Devil—or the Spirit of Evil—which was the same thing.

He didn't see how intelligent, observant people could deny the old Devil when they met him so often in public places, and even when they locked the bedroom door and hoped to find themselves alone.

"The surging-up of primitive instincts," said Margaret, quoting Hesketh and her secret thoughts.

"Exactly," said Halliday. "The Old Snake—curse him! I find him an awful nuisance sometimes."

She didn't believe that. He had put his foot on the snake and scotched it long ago. That was why she had come to him for spiritual help. She felt that he was the only man in the world who could help her out of this darkness of her soul. She wanted to kneel to him, to beg him for one glimpse of the light by which he lived.

For a little while he talked of the need of discipline and authority, though she didn't pay much attention to that part of his conversation because her thoughts were wandering back to her secret troubles about Cyril and Hesketh,

and Guy and Viola, and her own need of faith. He said something about the conflict of ideas in the English Church and the quarrel over the Prayer Book. He had had a row with his Bishop . . .

Then his landlady brought in two cups of beef tea and some rather mouldy-looking biscuits, interrupting serious conversation and gossiping about some scandal in Linnets' Grove, until Richard Halliday managed to get her out of the room again.

"One of my trials," he said, good-naturedly. "Still, she's a very good soul and has a thin time with a shell-shocked husband. Do have one of those biscuits. They're quite eatable, if you shut your eyes."

It was then that she asked him a question which had been at the back of her mind once or twice.

"Why are you wearing blue instead of black?"

He didn't answer for a moment, and seemed to shirk her question. But then he laughed in a slightly embarrassed way.

"I wondered if you would notice."

"It makes you look different," said Margaret.

"Yes," he said, "I feel different. In 'civvies' again. Demobilised!"

"But why?" she asked. For the first time she had a sense of uneasiness about that blue suit of his. What did he mean by being "demobilised"?

He hesitated for a second, with a little smile playing about his lips.

"I told you I might move on one day . . . The fact is I've chucked this job in Linnets' Grove. It's my last day here. I'm not a parson any longer."

Margaret gave a little cry of consternation. For a moment she became very pale and stared at him with a kind of fear.

"You have left the Church? Oh, no! I can't believe it."

"I had to go," he said. "I felt rather a humbug. Of course, it's a bit of a wrench."

"It's unbelievable," said Margaret in a low voice.

She was deeply distressed. Something seemed to have slipped under her feet, opening a dark pit. But Halliday did not notice her distress, or make light of it.

"I'm feeling happier than I've been for some time," he said cheerfully. "Less of a fraud!"

"They thought you a saint in Linnets' Grove!" she exclaimed. "Richard, you can't let them down. You must not!"

He admitted that they thought him a bit of a saint in Linnets' Grove, poor dears!

"That's what made me feel such a fake," he exclaimed. "You see, I was really pandering to my own egotism and trying to save my own soul by practising on theirs. Spiritual snobbishness! It struck me all of a heap one day when a woman knelt down in church and kissed my hand. I felt like Christ, for a moment, and then I was shocked by my own hypocrisy. Awful, wasn't it?"

"It wasn't true," said Margaret in a broken voice. "You weren't a hypocrite. You had given up everything."

"Except myself," he said with a smile.

He went to the window and looked out at Linnets' Grove and then turned and looked at Margaret again.

"That was the fraud of it! I had made a sort of religion of my own, and I was the glorious centre of it. I had given up Belgravia to be a popular parson in mean streets. Sheer egotism! I wasn't even loyal to my own uniform. It cramped my mind, somehow. Its buttons were giving way and my parson's collar was choking me! And then that woman knelt and kissed my hand. Oh, Lord, it made me feel desperately dishonest . . . So I sent in my papers, and now I am in an old blue suit, feeling ready for a new adventure."

He laughed cheerfully, as a man who had dropped a burden of care or had solved all doubts, and he was quite as-

tonished and distressed when Margaret cried out grief-stricken words.

"Then there's no faith in the world! . . . Oh, you've let me down! . . . I believed in you!"

For a moment he stood staring at her, as though puzzling over the meaning of her words, and that look of grief in her eyes. Then he seemed to understand.

"No faith?" he asked. "Oh, it isn't quite like that. I haven't ratted altogether. I'm not hankering after the flesh-pots. Not less faith, but more—that's what I'm after. A more complete surrender of self, and obedience to authority instead of mortal indiscipline. The fact is, I want to be a priest instead of a parson—the old faith, and the old tradition. My mind has been travelling that way for a long time, only my infernal egotism held me back."

"I believed in you," said Margaret miserably. "I thought you were loyal."

He answered her good-naturedly, without taking offence.

"It seems disloyal," he agreed. "I see that. One likes to stand by a sinking ship—sentimentally. But it's worse disloyalty to betray one's intellect. My mind had moved on. My sense of logic. I was held back by sentiment as well as egotism. Intellectually I had escaped months ago."

He began to talk about Authority, the unbroken line of tradition, the Unchanging Church, the only citadel against unbelief, but she was not listening to him. She only knew that he was leaving Linnets' Grove and that he had let her down and that he was deserting those who believed in him. Only vaguely she heard his words.

"I'm getting a job as a lay brother . . . The habit of St. Francis . . . I shall have to wash up plates! . . . Work, and prayer, and self-forgetfulness."

"It's running away from life," she said bitterly.

"One keeps in touch," he answered. "One enlarges one's love for humanity. One has time to pray for the poor old world!"

"We need friendship and service," she told him. "In Linnets' Grove and Wimbledon."

"Prayers reach out," he said. "I honestly believe that. Like wireless vibrations travelling in eternity. I'm going to establish a private transmitting station."

He tried to make a joke of this new adventure of his because it seemed to dismay her so much, but she could see no humour in it. He had let her down. She had come to him believing in his faith and loyalty. Now he was going away beyond the reach of her mind.

She rose and tightened the furs round her throat, and did not yield to his pleading of "Don't go!"

"I must go back to Wimbledon," she said. "Hesketh is right, after all. Faith is just an illusion. A question of temperament and one's ductless glands."

"God's in His Heaven!" said Halliday.

She shook her head.

"It's all a hoax . . . The whole thing is absurd . . . You've let me down . . . I don't believe in anything."

He stood smiling at her, with his back to the door, as though barring her way out.

"You don't mean all that," he said. "You're the most spiritual thing I know. You can't help yourself! . . . It was you who kept my lamp alight when it nearly flickered out for a time, and I walked in dark places. It was your beauty, Margaret, that kept me worshipful. That's why I understand Audley and young Cyril . . . I was rather in love with my ideal of you before you went up to Oxford and married your biologist. Didn't you know that?"

She didn't know it. Her heart seemed to stand still for a moment as he told her so, and a flame of colour leapt to her face and then died down and left her white.

"This silly face of mine!" she said. "My silly little soul!"

"Your loveliness—so flower-like," he told her, "and the saint in your eyes!"

She stretched out her hand and touched his arm.

"Stay here in Linnets' Grove!" she pleaded. "Don't go where we can't follow you."

"It's not far," he said. "Just across the road."

She shook her head.

"I'm Hesketh's wife and the daughter of—my father. Pray for me sometimes—if you think it's any good."

She held out her hand to him, and he pressed it to his heart for a moment.

"Always!" he said.

She went out into Linnets' Grove with a mist in her eyes. She was sorry that Richard Halliday would not be there in future. She had needed his help and now she felt more lonely in her soul. But it was strange and frightening that her pretty face made people love her so much. They idealised her, and she couldn't understand it. Her beauty, as they called it, seemed to have some spiritual magic, some quality of grace, God-given. Audley had told her so in his shy way. And now Richard said she had kept his lamp alight —his lamp of faith that had nearly flickered out . . . Hesketh loved her, and Cyril . . . It would be frightful if she let them down!

LVII

MARGARET let herself indoors with her latch-key when she reached home that afternoon, and she stood listening in the hall for a moment. The house was quiet without Viola or Cyril and she saw that Hesketh's door was shut. Probably he was in his laboratory again, and she wondered if he had had his lunch as usual. She felt desperately sorry for him, because he had been hurt so much by Cyril of whom he had been so proud always. She remembered how he had talked about the boy at Oxford before they were married . . . "He's the product of my mind." . . . "He's steeped in the scientific spirit." Now Cyril blamed him for having brought him into the world, and had gone off the deep end. Poor old Hesketh! She would have to comfort him somehow! Perhaps he would listen to her if she pleaded with him not to take Cyril's outburst too seriously. She would tell him what Richard had said about boys being jealous of their fathers sometimes. The Œdipus complex, wasn't it called? He ought to understand, being a biologist.

She wondered if Mrs. Squeede had left any lunch for her on the table. She was an hour late for it, and was beginning to feel hungry and weak. Whatever one's emotion might be, however empty one's spirit, the body refused to be ignored. The last thing she had eaten had been one of those mouldy biscuits in Linnets' Grove.

She went into the dining-room and saw that luncheon had been taken away. Then a moment later she was aware of someone standing by the window, with his back to her, looking out, and she was astounded to see that it was Guy there.

He must have heard her come into the room, for he swung round and said "Hullo!"

"Guy!" cried Margaret in a startled voice. "Why are you back? Where's Viola?"

He looked pale and unwell, as though he had been through some illness, and he answered moodily:

"I've left Viola with Audley and his people. . . . She's having a great time!"

He came over to her and kissed her, and then went to the mantelpiece and lit a cigarette, and she noticed that his hand shook as he held the match.

Margaret questioned him anxiously.

"Are you unwell or anything? Why have you come back so soon?"

He did not answer for a moment while he was busy with his cigarette. Then he spoke harshly, looking at her with a kind of angry light in his eyes.

"One doesn't stay where one's not wanted. Viola has chucked me, to put it plainly. I've got a letter for you."

He fumbled in his side pocket and pulled out a crumpled envelope addressed to Margaret in Viola's big scrawl.

"You needn't read it now," he said. "I don't suppose it's pleasant reading."

Margaret took the letter and held it for a moment before dropping it on the dining-room table.

"Viola can't chuck you, Guy," she said with a sudden passion in her voice. "It's too wicked. It's—it's abominable!"

Guy gave a kind of groan and flung himself into a chair and then leaned forward with his hands clasped under his chin.

"She's perfectly right," he said. "It was my fault mostly. She got fed up with me. We didn't agree about things."

"What things? Tell me, Guy."

Margaret felt her anger rising against Viola—rising into rage. She would never believe that it was Guy's fault, whatever happened. It was Viola's wildness, her disgusting ideas about life. Guy was so good-natured, so chivalrous, so sensitive to honour, so decent. It was Viola's wick-

edness that had made him look like this, so ill and haggard, as though he had been suffering agony. He was suffering now. She saw how tightly he clasped his hands, so that his knuckles were white, and how dark he was under the eyes.

"It's impossible to tell you," he said. "You wouldn't understand."

"Tell me!" she pleaded. "I'll try to understand. I'm not such an idiot as I used to be."

He smiled faintly for the first time and said, "I never noticed it!"

"Tell me!" she said again. "I must know, Guy. I must find out."

He hesitated and then shrugged his shoulders.

"There's nothing to tell."

Margaret gave a little cry of impatience and grief.

"Oh, Guy! How am I to know? What am I to say to Hesketh?"

He glanced at her uneasily, as though she tempted him to say things which he would rather hide.

"Tell him that Viola has chucked me. There's not much more in it than that. She prefers someone else, more suited to her. Of course, she has a perfect right."

Margaret gave a little gasp of astonishment and dismay.

"Someone else! Who is there?"

"Audley, of course," said Guy. "Your immaculate friend. She fell for him as soon as he appeared. I couldn't compete."

Margaret's face whitened. She felt rather faint. It was silly to feel faint like that. Guy couldn't be telling her the truth. He had imagined all this. Audley had been devoted to her. He had been in love with her. She had gone to him only a few weeks ago, emotionally, and only a miracle had saved her from self-surrender. She had been his ideal of womanhood and he had told her so and made her feel ashamed. She had felt happy when she knew that he was

with Guy and Viola as a kind of chaperon to keep them from dangerous adventure.

"It couldn't be Audley," she said. "You're making a mistake, Guy. It's not true."

"It's true as hell," he told her. "And after all, why not? It was my fault. I was a fool from start to finish."

He began to tell her now. Something seemed to loosen his tongue. He had a desperate need of self-revelation.

"I fooled around with conscience. That's what she couldn't stand. From the very beginning I had a ridiculous sense of guilt instead of making the best of life while I had the giddy chance. . . . She—she was like a wild thing—a bird out of a cage—when we got to Provence. The sunshine, and the blue sky, and everything, got hold of her. She was always singing and laughing, and letting herself go. . . . And I trudged along with her like a Puritan with a sick headache, always wondering whether I was behaving like a little Christian, and whether it was playing the game according to Harrow, and what God would say—or the governor—or the old ladies in Belgravia! She lay in my arms and I didn't kiss her because of my preposterous conscience. She came into my room at night and I asked her to go. . . . We had absurd scenes in French inns. . . . Of course, I was mad with love for her. I suffered horrible agonies. But all the time I held her off, and talked about marriage and the social code and that infernal conscience of mine. . . . She couldn't understand it. It seemed utterly idiotic to her. She thought I was an insufferable prig, at last, or a dirty little coward. And so I was. . . . She kept quoting those words of her father—that damned husband of your—'Youth is not afraid!' She wanted to find out what love meant, so that we could be dead sure of it and then marry with perfect understanding. That's the way she put it. You know how she talks! And of course she was right. I see that now, when it's too late."

Suddenly he put his hand up to his face and Margaret heard him sobbing.

"Guy!" she cried. "Oh, Guy! Viola was wrong. She was tempting you against yourself. You were in the right, Guy! You were true to your ideals. She was dragging you down. It was splendid of you to resist. It was Christlike, Guy!"

For some time he didn't answer. He went to the window, and stared out until he had mastered himself. Then he turned round and spoke bitterly.

"It was sheer cowardice. I funked love. Viola's idea of life is the only sensible one. A man's a fool if he listens to all that old woman's stuff about morality and conscience. Look at me now! I've rotted myself up."

"No!" said Margaret. "You've crucified yourself, Guy. I want to kneel to you. I believe in God again because He helped you."

"I'm finished," he said, with a kind of strangled sob.

He leaned against the mantelpiece with his head down on his arms.

"Oh, my dear," said Margaret. "How can I help you? How can I make you believe in yourself?"

Presently he twisted round and began to talk again, less emotionally, fighting for self-control.

"That fellow Audley came when things had reached a crisis. Of course, he made himself very civil and all that. He was vastly amused by Viola. I could see him watching her with amazement, as something beyond words. Then we got to his villa and Viola bewitched him while I sulked, as jealous as hell. Two nights ago—was it?—I heard them talking in the garden. It was after dinner and dark under the palm trees, although the stars were out in a blue sky. That sort of thing suits Viola. She responds to it! . . . I heard them talking. . . . Viola told Audley that she had made a mistake about me. She said we should make a hash of things because our minds were different. Then she began to cry and Audley—damn him!—took her in his arms and

kissed her, until she broke away and said, 'What about Margaret?'—"

Margaret felt a hot flame burn her face and she gave a cry of distress.

"Why did she say that? How dare she say that?"

He stared at her moodily, as though wondering whether Margaret were hiding some secret from him.

"She always thought Audley was in love with you. She thought you were rather gone on him, as she calls it. Are you, by any chance?"

Margaret did not shirk the truth. Their souls were naked now. She dared not keep anything back.

"I liked him awfully, Guy, and once I was tempted, in a mad sort of way. I'm dreadfully ashamed."

"That's all right," he said. "I suppose it's human nature. This muck called life!"

She hated the harshness and bitterness of those words. There was something awful in them from Guy. They made her flesh creep.

"If we could believe in God—" she said pitifully.

Guy laughed mirthlessly, as though at some grim jest.

"Oh, I've done with that sort of thing. It's a hoax."

She remembered saying that to Richard Halliday only a few hours ago, and the remembrance struck her like a blow. Cyril had said it first, and now Guy was saying it. She also had denied God, as Peter had denied Christ and then had wept.

"Guy," she cried, "we must get back somehow—spiritually. We've gone all wrong. We've got into a dreadful mess, my dear, in our souls. This lawlessness and unbelief—this paganism—it's frightful, Guy!"

He answered her impatiently, almost brutally.

"That's all tosh, old girl! What's the good of torturing oneself? I've been tortured by my rotten conscience. Now Viola has chucked me. What the devil am I going to do now?"

He broke down again and turned away in agony.

She went over to him and put her arms about him.

"We'll get back again—just as we used to be. There's always the beauty you used to love. There's a lot more in life than passion and self-pity. Viola's not everything. There are spiritual things, and a bigger kind of love. If we learn to pray again, Guy—"

He drew himself roughly out of her arms.

"We're not babies in Belgravia," he said. "We've got beyond that nursery stuff. It's the Age of Reason, isn't it? You ought to know—among all these Jerninghams with their blasted science. . . . Anyhow, it's no use talking."

He refused to talk any more about it. He pointed to the letter on the table and said, "You'd better read that. . . . I'll get back and report myself at home. I sent them a wire."

She tried to persuade him to stay, and pleaded with him to spend the night at Wimbledon, but he said he wanted to think things out, and seemed to shirk meeting Hesketh. He kissed her before he went and said, "It's no use worrying."

When he had gone she read Viola's letter, though it was hard to read because her eyes were wet.

"My dearest Margaret," wrote Viola, "I'm most frightfully sorry about Guy. We're not a bit of use to each other, really, because I'm everything that goes against his conscience and tradition, and I can't understand what's working in his mind. Hopeless, isn't it? I feel miserable about it, especially as Audley and I get on extraordinarily well together. That seems awfully disloyal to you, and I hate grabbing. But then you're a saint and you'd be dreadfully unhappy if you left father. Audley worships you, and he hates to hurt Guy, but I've knocked him edgewise by my abominable beauty, which, as you know, is not my fault. We're the creatures of heredity. Still, it's a dreadful mix-up and I feel hot and bothered about it, especially as you'll think I'm wicked. It's not wickedness really. It's human nature and the urge of creation. So, my dear Margaret, be

generous about it, and help me to be happy. A hundred kisses to you and father, and tell Guy that I don't bear any grudge against him although his conscience—he can't help it, poor boy!—was like a sword between us when I offered him my love."

Margaret dropped the letter to the floor and stood there staring out of the window, but blind to all but an inner vision. Here in Viola's scrawl was the conflict of life which had touched Margaret's own soul. Viola was the pagan heart of the world. . . . Guy's conscience had stood between them like a sword. Now he had lost his faith. Viola had killed it. It was the spirit against the flesh, and the spirit was weak because of unbelief. It was only Richard Halliday who held on to the Spirit, and found some strange peace of his own. Even Audley had weakened. What had he said to her once? "Allah is great but juxtaposition is greater." He too had surrendered to the pagan side of life, to the laughing grace of Viola, with her animal ideas, her soulless beauty. She would drag him down as she had dragged Guy down. . . . Hesketh was all wrong. His ideas had led to all this misery. It was Hesketh's fault really. . . .

Margaret went out of the dining-room and along the passage towards the laboratory. She hammered at Hesketh's door and called to him.

"Hesketh! . . . Hesketh!"

He opened the door and answered quietly.

"What is it, my dear? I'm working. . . . It's always best to work."

"Oh, Hesketh!" she cried, "Viola has thrown over Guy. And it's your fault. It's all your fault, Hesketh!"

She found herself weeping with a silly violence, and Hesketh put his arms about her and hushed her down, more like a father than a husband. He had aged a little in the loneliness of his laboratory that day.

LVIII

CYRIL came home late that night, and said, "Sorry, father!"

It was good enough perhaps, and Hesketh put his hand on the boy's shoulder for a moment, and said, "Life's difficult, old man. . . . Have you had supper? Margaret has gone to bed already. She's not very well to-night."

He did not say anything about Viola or Guy. There had been enough trouble for one day. He would talk it out calmly with Cyril in the morning, as far as such a thing could be talked out. He would have to reshape his ideas a little. Life was more difficult than he had imagined—the Age of Reason further off than he had hoped. Cyril had gone back on him. Now there was this new affair with Viola —rather worrying, of course. He still believed in Viola, though he hadn't said so to Margaret. That boy Guy would get over his emotion all right. It was far better that Viola should break with him now than plunge into an unhappy marriage with the lad. The boy was neurotic really, over-sensitive and conscience-haunted. That "conscience" which had been left over from the Dark Ages when men and women were afraid of God's wrath! Amazing, he thought, and dreadful. And yet he ought to make allowances for it in modern life. Perhaps he had made a mistake in educating Cyril and Viola in advance of their time. The social code couldn't be flouted without a lot of personal unhappiness. If one stood outside the ideas of one's time it created a disharmony with life. Cyril probably had his mother in him. She had been a conventionalist with a suburban mind. A "good Churchwoman." By some law of heredity Cyril had

been unable to liberate himself from that religious emotion, that need of mysticism, which seemed necessary for certain minds. It was vastly disappointing to Hesketh, almost a knock-out blow. In his laboratory, with the door shut, he had been thinking hard of all this. Cyril's outburst about Margaret had made him very angry but he had got the better of that. He was much more disturbed by Cyril's challenge to his philosophy of life. The boy had said he was "all wrong." He had talked a lot of strange stuff about the spiritual reality of life, and mysteries beyond the reach of science. Probably there was some truth in that. Hesketh acknowledged to himself, humbly, that he had been too dogmatic, perhaps even too narrow in his interpretation of natural law. But he would never admit the possibility of direct interference with material law, or divine revelation. That would be a betrayal of his scientific faith. Nor could he admit, even to Margaret, poor dear, the chance of supernatural help in human affairs, or the survival of personality in some mythical after-life where virtue would be rewarded and vice punished. He could not deny the evidence of science. He could not pretend to believe in the unsound evidence of religious teaching. No message had ever come from that other world. There was no justification in reason for such ways of life as that adopted by Richard Halliday of whom Margaret had been talking before she went to bed.

They had talked for an hour or more, heart to heart, and hand in hand. She had told him all about Audley and her trials and tribulations after the death of her baby. It had given him rather a shock at first, her fancy for that young man, Audley Instone. It might have been serious. He might have had to make a tragic renunciation for Margaret's sake. He would never have kept her against her will. . . . Not playing the game. . . . Then she had talked a lot about Viola's "paganism," and Guy's "idealism," and he had had to hide his secret thoughts a little. He had been almost insincere for Margaret's sake, not letting her know that he

was all on Viola's side and that he had a lack of sympathy for that delicate brother of hers and his weak little "conscience." Of course, he was sorry for the boy. He was sorry for all growing pains of youth. They had to go through them. It was part of the struggle of evolution, the agony of development. Guy would get through it all right, and Viola would be happier without him. Viola had leapt ahead. She was a true child of that Age of Reason which one day must come to heal the world of all these mental and physical distresses.

Hesketh smoked a quiet pipe, thinking out these things, after Cyril had gone to bed. Then he locked up quietly and tiptoed into Margaret's room. She was asleep, poor child, after all her worry. How beautiful she looked with her face sideways on the pillow! Perhaps he had been unfair to marry a young girl like this, as Cyril had told him. A younger man ought to have been her lover, not a withered old biologist! Her beauty had put a spell on him at Oxford, when she had sat so close to him in that lecture-room, so shy and exquisite, so flower-like. His love had made him feel like a boy again. He had felt the romance of love in middle age.

Hesketh listened to her quiet breathing. She must have cried herself to sleep, poor child, because her cheek was still wet. He was tempted to stoop down and kiss her, but did not dare lest he should wake her up. He took his clothes off in his little dressing-room and then crept into his own bed, stealthily.

It was at two o'clock, as Hesketh remembered afterwards, when he was wakened by a cry from Margaret.

"Hesketh!"

He switched on the light and said, "What is it, sweetheart?"

She was sitting up in bed with her hands to her breast, but suddenly she slipped out of bed and stood there in her nightgown, no whiter than her face.

"Hesketh," she said, "there's something the matter with Guy."

Hesketh answered quietly.

"You've been dreaming. . . . A nightmare, dear heart!"

"No," said Margaret. "I saw him here. He stood close to me. I saw him clearly. He wanted to tell me something. . . . Hesketh, I'm afraid."

Hesketh tried to laugh her fear away.

"There's nothing to be afraid of. It was just a dream. Get into bed again, my darling. You'll catch cold."

She stood there quite still and took no notice of his words.

"I must go to him," she said. "Hesketh, you'll have to drive me in the car or get Cyril to come. Something has happened."

"My dear child!" said Hesketh a little impatiently. "Do be reasonable. A dream—"

"He came to me," she said. "I woke up and saw him. He wanted me."

"Oh, nonsense!" laughed Hesketh. "Pull yourself together, Margaret."

He got out of bed and held her in his arms. She was trembling, as though she had the ague.

"Oh, Hesketh!" she cried. "I believe Guy has done something frightful."

Hesketh was angry with her—alarmed by this hysteria, this trembling of her body, this belief in the reality of a foolish dream.

And then suddenly he was startled and a little afraid. The telephone was ringing downstairs. It was strange that anyone should be trying to ring up in the middle of the night.

Cyril had heard it and came into the bedroom in his pyjamas.

"The telephone is ringing," he said. "Do you think I'd better answer it?"

But it was Margaret who went. She slipped from Hes-

keth's arms and he heard her bare feet running downstairs, and the swish of her nightdress.

"What's up?" asked Cyril.

"God knows," said Hesketh. "It's all rather alarming. . . . Queer, anyhow."

He was more alarmed when he followed Margaret downstairs into the study where the telephone stood on his desk. Cyril was close behind him but came no further than the door, as if afraid of something.

Margaret was listening to some message. She dropped the receiver and stood there like a spirit with the lamp on the desk shining on her white nightdress.

"Who is it?" asked Hesketh.

"It's father," said Margaret. "Guy is dead. He has shot himself."

She spoke the words as though she were in a kind of trance, unemotionally, and Hesketh felt his blood run cold. . . . Then it was not a dream she had had. . . . The boy had come to her. . . . Something—queer! . . .

He saw Margaret sway a little and rushed to catch her, and held her before she fainted.

Cyril stood in the doorway in his pyjamas.

"Oh, Christ!" he said, and put his arm across his face.

THE END